Tattoos and Piercings During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Permanent tattoos and piercings help people express themselves and give their bodies a “custom paint job.” They can represent individuality, personality, and passions. For myself, I love the process of picking out a new piece of art to wear on my body!

MotherToBaby specialists often get questions about the safety of tattoos and piercings during pregnancy and breastfeeding. There are many general safety guidelines tattoo artists and piercers follow to keep their customers as healthy as possible. Does this look any different for those who are pregnant or breastfeeding?

What does the research show?

Here is where it gets a bit hard to answer: We do not have a lot of research on tattoos and piercings during pregnancy or breastfeeding. That is mostly because these are cosmetic and not needed for medical care or daily living. Without research studies, it is hard for us to know the risks of tattoos and piercing during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. However, we can discuss what is known, and what someone might consider before getting a tattoo or piercing.

The Immune System- Infections and Reactions

During pregnancy, your immune system changes, which can make it easier to get certain infections, including ones that are rare but dangerous. With any tattoo or piercing, there is a small risk of infection, even if precautions are taken by yourself and the person doing the tattoo or piercing.

- The most common bacterial infections from body modifications come from ***staphylococcus*** and ***streptococcus*** types of bacteria (see our staphylococcus aureus fact sheet, Group Strep A infections fact sheet, and Group B Strep fact sheet). These infections can occur during a tattoo or piercing due to proper cleaning habits not being followed, or through normal day-to-day contact with the new tattoo or piercing. Most of the time, these infections stay local (at the area where the tattoo/piercing was done), but sometimes they can get into the bloodstream and cause more severe illness.

- ***Rarely,*** would somebody get a more serious infections, such as hepatitis, HIV, or syphilis, from a tattoo or piercing. These infections have been seen when a tattoo or piercing professional or shop does not follow strict hygiene or sterilizing guidelines.

People may experience allergic reactions during tattoo or piercings. This could come from the metals used in piercings, the ingredients found in tattoo ink, or even from some of the materials used by the piercer/tattooist. Because of those immune changes during pregnancy, it is possible to have a new reaction or a stronger reaction to an exposure during a

tattoo or piercing while pregnant.

Piercings during pregnancy

The Association of Professional Piercers, an international health and safety organization aimed at supporting both piercing professionals and the public, does not recommend getting a new piercing or stretching out an existing piercing while pregnant. In addition to the slim risk of infection, it is also possible that healing of a piercing can be negatively affected by the immune changes during pregnancy. In fact, someone might even notice that a healed piercing might become irritated while they are pregnant. The Association of Professional Piercers suggests waiting until 3 months after pregnancy to consider getting a new piercing.

Piercings and breastfeeding

Because the body does not have the same immune system demands during breastfeeding, piercings are typically considered acceptable during breastfeeding, except for nipple piercings. The Association of Professional Piercers suggests waiting 3 months after stopping breastfeeding before getting a nipple piercing.

Existing nipple piercings have not been shown to affect the ability to breastfeed. However, having a nipple piercing can lead to buildup of scar tissue, which could block or damage some milk ducts. There is also a chance that milk could leak from the piercing holes. It is suggested to remove nipple jewelry during feedings to prevent choking hazards or interference with latching. If you are using a pump, removing nipple jewelry while pumping will improve your comfort and might help your breast pump work better.

Tattoos during pregnancy

In addition to needles damaging the skin, getting a permanent tattoo also involves getting ink placed into your body. These inks include many different chemicals and ingredients, and we do not have research on the use of a lot of these ingredients during pregnancy. Also, tattoo ink is expected to stay in the skin layers, but it is not known how much, if any, of the ink ingredients get into the bloodstream.

There is a theoretical (not proven) concern that if someone were to get a pain injection in the back to help with labor (called an epidural) over a back tattoo, some of the pigments from the tattooed skin could get into parts of the body near the epidural site. Because of this, a healthcare provider would typically try and avoid the tattooed areas. Be sure to talk to your healthcare team about any concerns regarding your tattoos.

Tattoos and breastfeeding

There is no research on the safety of tattooing while breastfeeding. There are theoretical (not proven) concerns about tattoo ink ingredients or infections getting to a child who is breastfeeding. Some healthcare providers suggest not getting a new tattoo while breastfeeding and some say to wait until a baby is 9-12 months old, or is weaned from

breast milk, to decrease any risks. This suggestion is not based on research studies, but more of a suggestion out of caution.

The bottom line

While tattoos and piercings are wonderful ways for someone to express themselves, there are some risks that can come from getting them during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Many tattoo artists and piercers will not be willing to do tattoos and piercings while someone is pregnant or breastfeeding.

Your healthcare provider can talk to you about some of the health concerns related to tattoos and piercings. The Association of Professional Piercers has resources on selecting a piercer here and FAQ's including pregnancy and breastfeeding questions here.

As always, MotherToBaby is here to help answer any questions you might have during pregnancy or breastfeeding.

References

Association of Professional Piercers. (N.D.) Frequently Asked Questions. Available at: https://safepiercing.org/piercing-faq/. Accessed 19 May 2026.

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