

Executive Lifestyles:

Health

(Tattoo Removal)

By Diane Sears



Disappearing Ink

Improving laser technology and new, easier-to-erase inks make tattoo removal less time-consuming.

As a human resources professional in Orange County, Heather felt hypocritical discouraging employees from getting tattoos. She herself had one on the top of her foot — a daisy that cost \$35 when she was 22.

Tired of hiding it on the job, she decided to have it removed. She researched her options on the internet and found a medical office that used the most modern laser technology to erase the tattoo's pigment from the skin.

"I just didn't feel like it was professional-looking, and I honestly regretted it. It's not me," says Heather, who did not want her last name used. "It's permanent. You can't just wash it off. You live with that forever. I can't see being an older woman with a tattoo."

Ten treatments and more than \$1,000 later, the daisy has faded, but Heather expects to need four or five more treatments before it's unnoticeable. She says each 30-minute session feels like rubber bands snapped against her skin in rapid succession, leaving her with a stinging sensation and sometimes blisters. She tries to have the treatments right before the weekend so she can wear sandals afterward.

Dr. Mark Nestor hears stories like Heather's every day. As a dermatologist, laser surgeon and founder of the Center for Cosmetic Enhancement in Aventura, he has removed tattoos from

people of all ages and professions for 14 years.

His office uses Q-switched lasers, which are effective at removing various colors from the skin. He first applies a topical anesthetic and sometimes gives injections so the patient doesn't feel the sting from treatment. The area becomes crusted like a wound for a few days. Treatments typically are administered four to six weeks apart to give the wound time to heal, Nestor says.

The price varies depending on the size and pattern of the tattoo, ranging from \$200 to \$2,000 per treatment, he says.

Some tattoos are easier to remove than others. Lasers are geared toward the dark-

The Rise of Tattoos

► In 1936, *Life* magazine estimated 6% of the U.S. population had at least one tattoo. By 2003, 16% of Americans had one or more tattoos, according to a 2003 Harris poll.

► 36% of people ages 18-25 and 40% of people ages 26-40 have at least one tattoo, according to a 2006 survey by the Pew Research Center.

► Tattoo parlors number more than 20,000 in the United States and ranked as the sixth-fastest-growing business in the 1990s, according to U.S. *News & World Report*.

► Tattoo removal also is becoming more prevalent, increasing 17% between 2001 and 2005. About 55,000 procedures were performed in 2005, the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery reports.

Sources: vanishingtattoo.com and WebMD.com



Nestor

est colors, such as black and dark blue, and can remove those more quickly than greens, reds, oranges, tans and other lighter shades.

There's promise for future tattoo wearers, though: Improving laser technology and new inks that can be removed in two or three treatments instead of 10 to 15.

Nestor advises people thinking of having a tattoo removed to find a doctor with experience and the appropriate equipment to prevent scarring. His more emphatic advice for people considering getting a tattoo: "Really think two, three and four times about being a grandmother or grandfather and trying to explain that to the kids." ■