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TATTOOS – FROM SKIN TO LYMPH NODES AND BEYOND?

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Tattoos are gaining social acceptance. The number of people with tattoos, the number of articles and documentations about tattoos in the media as well as the number of tattoo studios are increasing. However, the consequences of intradermal injection of tattoo ink are often neglected. The composition of tattoo inks is highly variable, and inks can contain many allergenic or carcinogenic components. Recent publications show loss of one third of the originally injected ink hours after application. Incidental findings of colored lymph nodes in biopsies demonstrate drainage of tattoo ink into lymphatic vessels and lymph nodes. Immunocompetent cells of the dermis and lymph nodes react with components of tattoo ink and granulomatous or delayed-type hypersensitivity reactions are possible consequences. Therefore, more research about the interaction between tattoo ink components and the human immune system has to be performed to finally set up a positive list of tattoo ink components of definable adverse effects.