



INTRAORAL TATTOO: AN UNHINGED BODY ART

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ABSTRACT

Inner lip tattooing is perhaps the latest trend in body art. Tattooing is not just a trend but it is also accepted as a personal sign. Although the general acceptance of tattoos is on the rise in western society, they still carry a heavy stigma among certain social groups. Here a case of a 22-year-old male who tattooed his girlfriend's name on his lower lip is presented.

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Inner lip tattooing is perhaps the latest trend in body art. Tattooing is not just a trend but it is also accepted as a personal sign. A case of a 22-year-old male who tattooed his girlfriend's name on his lower lip is presented (Figure 1).

Tattoos are strongly associated with deviance, personality disorders, and criminality.^[1] Although the general acceptance of tattoos is on the rise in western society, they still carry a heavy stigma among certain social groups. In certain religions especially Buddhism and Hinduism, tattoos play an important role as ritual tools and part of tradition. Tattooing rituals are also common to tribes of South East Asia. Ramnaamis are a sect of Hindus in North India who tattoo their entire body including the tongue and inside of the lips, believing that it protects them from harm.^[2,3]

Intraoral tattooing is extremely painful and expensive procedure.³ Oral mucosal tattoos may fade away due to the action of saliva within few months but some may stay up to five years. Rarely they pose serious health risks such as infection, swelling, granuloma formation and scarring.⁴ Intraoral tattoos may have an additional risk of gingival recession around the lower anterior teeth that are in contact with the tattoo ink.^[4]

Tattoo inks are subject to regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as cosmetics and color additives.^[5] This regulatory authority is, however, not generally exercised. Many pigments used in tattoo inks are industrial-grade colours suitable for printers' ink or automobiles. These contain many components including metallic salts, carbon, aluminium, oxygen, azo pigments and polycyclic compounds.^[3] There are reported cases of

malignancy arising from cosmetic tattoos of the lips.^[6] The adverse effects of long term use of intraoral tattoos are yet to be documented. Dental clinicians should warn the public of the possible risks associated with this body art.



Figure 1: Tattoo on lower labial mucosa.

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