



Strategy For Extended Tattoo Sittings

Fresh tattoos are an open wound and getting them puts stress on the immune system. A stressed immune system has a decreased ability to fight off sickness or infection. Therefore, it's important to care for one's health in the weeks or days leading up to a long or intense sitting by eating nutritious foods, getting adequate sleep, and avoiding unnecessary traumas to the body.

Self-care is also important during the day of the tattoo session. Eating a large and balanced meal beforehand provides the body with nutrients to sustain energy and pain tolerance. It also maintains adequate blood sugar levels, which helps the body withstand the adrenalin rush that often comes at the beginning of a tattoo session. Without this boost, that adrenalin rush leads to a higher likelihood of getting light-headed, sick, and/or passing out. Bringing some food and drink to snack on later in the day, when energy and tolerance levels drop, can also make a long tattoo session easier.

Taking ibuprofen (non-aspirin) pain relievers before and during the sitting can help relieve soreness and swelling. While not eliminating pain completely, this may have enough of an effect to increase one's endurance.

Topical pain-relieving products can also provide some relief during the later stages of a tattoo session, when large areas of skin are open, raw, and sore. These products are available at any well-stocked pharmacy, with or near the other pain relievers. They contain a mild numbing agent, which can be effective for 20-30 minutes at a time on already broken skin. Most tattooers are happy to use this at the end of a long session if it's been requested and supplied by the client.

Books, iPads, portable DVD players, laptops or Kindles can all provide a measure of distraction from the discomfort of a long tattoo session. However, the age-old practice of meditation, relaxation breathing, or 'mind over matter' techniques is nearly foolproof, and ultimately provides the most lasting, simple, and effective way to overcome temporary discomfort.

Finally, healing a very large tattoo from a long session can be more intensive than a small area that's undergone less trauma. So while it's wise to implement a self-care regimen before and during the tattoo session, doing so afterwards is just as crucial. This helps the body thoroughly recover from the event, ultimately resulting in a better-looking tattoo. In extreme cases, Ibuprofen can be continued until swelling and soreness diminish, in addition to icing and elevation of the affected limb.

Using Meditation To Relieve Discomfort

First, it's important to change the mental focus of a tattoo experience from a negative concept of pain, which tends to carry a story of suffering, to a neutral concept of sensation, which tends to carry only observations. This simple shift in thinking can be incredibly effective in changing a mood of tension and nervousness into calm acceptance, or even curiosity. This is because a typical response to pain is the instinct to run away from it, or to push and fight against it mentally. In contrast, a typical response to merely observing new sensations is a feeling of openness and discovery. Once the decision to get a tattoo has been made, it's simply a waste of energy trying to block out something inevitable and unavoidable, like physical discomfort. A more effective response instead, is a shift in attitude towards neutral acceptance.

The term acceptance refers to being willing to accept any physical sensations into the body, and then letting the experience pass through the mind as a momentary phenomenon. In doing this over and over again, any moments of discomfort remain temporary, which is their true nature. In this way they're merely moving past, while the mind rests on a solid ground of peaceful, non-attached observation.

The simplest way to reach this relaxed state is to focus all thought upon one's breathing, literally one single breath at a time, if needed. The brief pauses in the tattoo process, when the tattooer is dipping into his ink caps or cleaning her needle tips, provide frequent opportunities for taking a deep breath, releasing tension, and resetting one's mental focus.

Imagine as you exhale air, that you're releasing the uncomfortable sensation felt in that moment. Over and over again, in each passing moment, this technique can help remind you of your own strength and endurance.

Another factor one can experiment with is the frequency of tattoo sessions. Some people discover that making appointments at shorter, regular intervals helps them maintain their focus and motivation, whereas other people prefer a longer period of time between particularly grueling sessions, in order to regain the necessary willpower and stamina to continue with the project. Regardless of preference, working with the tattooer's preferred scheduling frequency is often beneficial to the final outcome of the tattoo.

No matter which coping strategy is used while 'under the needle,' the most important thing to remember is that getting tattooed is almost all mental. One's attitude and thoughts go a surprisingly long way in determining the level of enjoyment in the experience. It's up to the individual being tattooed to choose the most effective thoughts and behaviors to manage any discomfort or unpleasantness that arises. Beautiful body art and a sense of accomplishment are the lasting rewards for doing so.