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Pioneers in tattoo removal

Here today, and gone tomorrow

Unlike diamonds, a tattoo is no longer forever. Having one removed using a Q-switch laser machine can be a two-minute procedure, writes **Caroline Berdon**.

Tattoos are so yesterday – at least, you’d think so given the amount of people getting them removed.

It seems more viable than ever to follow the latest Sanskrit body art trend as a teen, or needle the name of your lover on your arm, only to have the statement erased in your more mature years, or when you go through a break-up.

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Laser specialist Mike Anderson at Think Again Laser Clinic in Sydney’s inner west says tattoo removal has become more obtainable to the everyday individual in the last couple of years, due to higher levels of



People often fall out of love with their tattoos after a few years.

training, knowledge and technology available, which have all helped to lower the price of the procedure.

According to a 2012 study from the National Health and Medical Research Council, one in seven Australians has a tattoo, more than a third of them regret it and one in seven of them is considering removal.

Kelly Marr, 34, had a Celtic black dragon inked on her lower back when she was 18, but fell out of love with it as she grew older.

She found a local tattoo removalist online and after seven sessions of less than 10

minutes, it was gone – bar a “slight shadow”. She’s delighted. But wiping the slate clean was a “costly, painful process”, she adds.

Back in 1999, Marr’s ink cost her \$100 (she estimates it would cost her \$350-\$400 today). The dragon’s removal set her back \$1200.

While getting her tattoo was uncomfortable, its removal was “exceptionally painful – like having boiling hot oil spat on you”.

Anderson, who has undertaken the treatment himself, admits it’s painful, and says any company that claims otherwise is

simply being dishonest. But the procedure is “very quick, lasting on average two minutes”, he says.

For those who can’t stand the pain, he applies intense cooling of -40C to the area before, during and after treatment.

Perhaps more crucial is the question of scarring. Lasers have left burns and permanent marks on patients in the past. But this is likely down to the removalist’s lack of training and a sub-standard laser.

Regulation of the laser treatment industry varies from state to state. While Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia have some rules in place, anyone in NSW and Victoria can buy a cheap laser machine online, do a weekend course and call themselves an accredited laser technician.

Think Again uses the Q-switch laser machine, the industry standard, but many technicians use the much cheaper intense pulse light (IPL) lasers.

If the procedure is done correctly, Anderson says, there is little chance of scarring, providing the client follows some basic post-care instructions.

He urges those considering tattoo removal to do their research. Check reviews of a clinic on social media and Google, request before and after photos and only consider a specialist clinic that dedicates its whole livelihood to the procedure.

But of course, this could all be avoided by choosing the right tattoo to begin with. “Print off your design on A3 paper and stick it on your fridge for six months,” suggests Anderson.

“Then see if you still like it.”