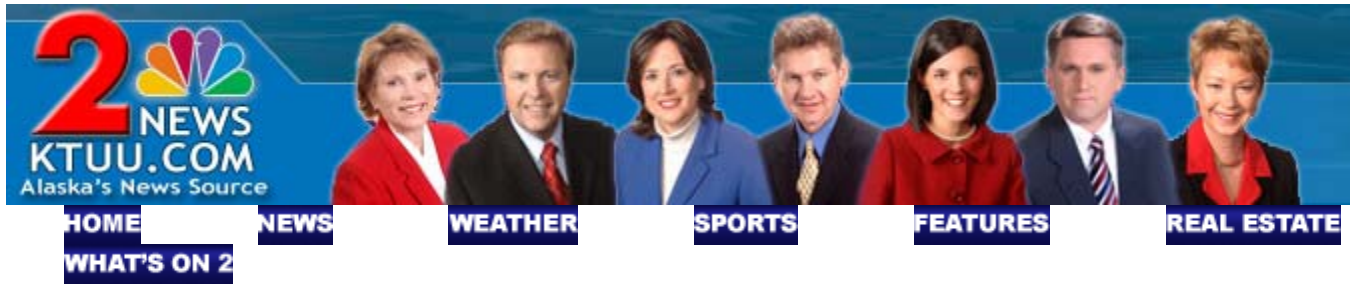


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New tattoo removal technology available in state



This anonymous patient's tattoos have become something she hides, and she decided to have them removed. (Eric Sowl/KTUU-TV)

by Joy Mapaye
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Anchorage, Alaska - It is considered one of the most advanced lasers in the world for tattoo removal and the technology is now available in Alaska.

More than two decades ago, tattoos on this anonymous patient captured a very different person. Now, rather than showing the tattoos off, they've become something to hide. And for this patient, it's time the tattoos came off.



The tattoos are being removed with a new laser removal technology that reduces the amount of time and discomfort for the procedure. (Eric Sowl/KTUU-TV)

Dr. Jayne Fortson is helping with that process. Numbing the skin is optional, but because of the tattoo's size, it's the more comfortable option. Next comes a gel application, which Dr. Fortson says will make a surface between the laser and skin.

Fortson says with tattoo removal, there's always some guessing involved, since inks are not regulated and there are no standard tattoo pigments. That means anyone can make any tattoo ink, sell to any tattoo parlor and put the ink at any depth in the skin.

"So that's why with tattoo patients, it's very hard to promise exactly what we're going to get, because you don't know what you're dealing with in the first place," Fortson said.

But thanks to a new machine, tattoo removal just got a little easier. It's because the laser is actually four-in-one, with four different wavelengths, each one specific for a different color.

"This laser is faster and it delivers much more energy. And what that means to the patient is that they will have many fewer



Dr. Jayne Fortson said there is a certain amount of guess work involved in removing tattoos because different tattoo artists use different methods and ink. (Eric Sowl/KTUU-TV)

treatments," Fortson said.

Here's how it works:

The laser sees the special colors of ink, and then the ink is matched with one of the four lasers. The laser is activated and the light passes through the skin and absorbed by the ink. The ink is then broken up into tiny particles, which is removed naturally by the body.

Depending on the size of the tattoo, the patient and the ink, it could take a minimum of five treatments to remove the tattoo completely.



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For this patient, it is time well-spent to leave pictures of the past behind. In addition to speed of removal, the laser can cover a much wider area and can also be used for all skin colors.

The cost of removal depends on the size of the tattoo. A basic session starts at \$150.

Fortson added that experts discussed regulating tattoo inks in the future at a recent convention of dermatologists. Some suggested that using inks that respond to specific lasers would make tattoo removal easier for individuals who change their minds about body art.

She added, however, that those plans were only in the discussion phase.



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