

Here's how pencils can permanently 'tattoo' your skin

Ever been stabbed by a pencil? That little mark is probably here to stay.



What's the deal with 'tattoos' from pencils? @nanatat07/Twitter | @ellie_norred/Twitter
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By Lindsay Lowe

Have you ever been poked by a pencil and noticed that it left a mark?

A surprising number of people are walking around with tiny, dark dots on their skin, evidence that at one point — even years ago, even as a kid — they were stabbed by a pencil.

These pencil markings went viral recently when one Twitter user posed a simple question:

Hello I'm looking for people who have led from their pencil stuck inside their bodies

— Los (@Los_Writer) January 7, 2019

His tweet was flooded with thousands of responses from people sharing photos of their own pencil spots on their hands, legs and even faces.

Hello. I got frustrated while practicing single digit multiplication in 3rd grade and decided to slam my head on the table. However, I hit my pencil that was sticking point up. It's still here 11 years later. pic.twitter.com/ZrkKAsI8bS

— Samuel Hepola (@HepolaSamuel) January 8, 2019

Many acquired these marks because of accidents in elementary school and still can't wash them off years later as adults.

Art class in 6th Grade👁️ pic.twitter.com/C90uNaKT0H

— mak (@makenseylayne) [January 8, 2019](#)

Can being stabbed by a pencil really leave such a permanent blemish? Absolutely, Dr. Fayne Frey, a dermatologist based in Nyack, New York, said. In fact, these little dots are called “traumatic tattoos.”

“They are tattoos,” she told TODAY Style in an email. “They are permanent stains that remain in the skin just like the tattoos applied with oxide inks.”



And, like ink tattoos, they can be at least partly removed with laser technology, though it depends on “the material causing the tattoo, the depth, how long the tattoo’s been present.”

We have the same one👁️ pic.twitter.com/Q09lVjc1Pf

— Ellie Marie👁️ (@ellie_norred) [January 9, 2019](#)

Pencils leave these marks when little bits of carbon or graphite get stuck within the dermis, the thick layer of skin that lies beneath our visible skin, the epidermis.

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Usually, this is harmless, but there are always precautions to take when the skin is punctured by any foreign body, dermatologist Dr. Cameron Rokhsar, founder of the New York Cosmetic, Skin & Laser Surgery Center, said.

“The main risk is really infection,” he told TODAY Style. So if you’re ever stabbed by a pencil, “wash it with soap and water, absolutely, and put antibiotic ointment on it.”

That said, if you've had a "pencil tattoo" for years with no adverse side effects, you are probably in the clear.

Omg my right thumb, I didn't know this was a common thing 🤔

pic.twitter.com/BQhmGzgKr5

— sav-age 🦖 (@nanatat07) January 8, 2019

If laser removal isn't an option, Rokhsar says pencil tattoos do fade slowly over time, just like regular tattoos.

It can take decades, though, something he knows from firsthand experience.

"When I was 7 years old, my cousin stabbed me with a pencil in my arm, and the pencil broke in my arm," he told TODAY. "I still have it; I still have that area of pigmentation."

So these tiny "pencil tattoos" are surprisingly common — and they often come with vivid (and painful-sounding) stories!