

6 most painful places to tattoo, according to experts

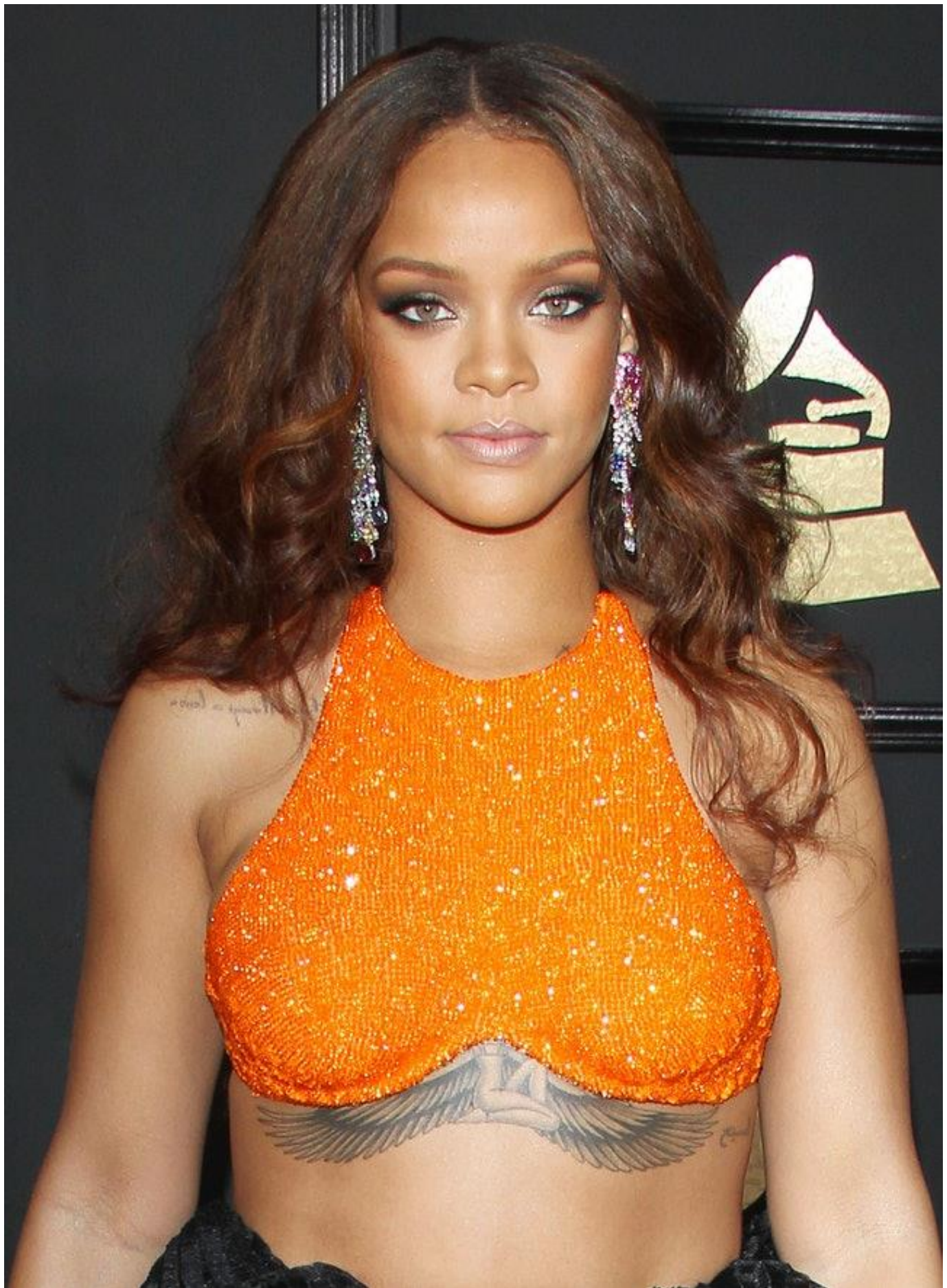
By **Michael Stahl**

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There are few things a person can do to their body that are as exhilarating as getting a tattoo. The euphoria accompanied by the deliberate, almost ceremonial process of tattooing can be so intense that some even claim to be addicted to it. One aspect of tattooing that can be at least a little off-putting for many, though, is the inevitable pain that comes with someone rapidly poking your skin with a needle up to 3,000 times per minute. It's still under hot debate whether getting inked on certain parts of your body is more painful than others, but if you're squeamish and aren't sure how you'll handle this very specific type of pain, you might not want to start in these places on your body.

Rib cage

Our rib cages generally feature particularly thin skin, little to no fatty tissue between the skin and underlying bones, and oodles of nerve endings. "As the skin gets thinner, there's less other tissue to cushion it," says Dr. Risa Ravitz, a New York City-based neurologist and pain management specialist. "There's interestingly a lot of nerves running above and below all the ribs in those muscles."



The ribcage bones serve as protection of vital organs, such as the heart and lungs, and Ravitz adds that it's "a reasonable deduction" to say that the rib cage has many nerve endings around it because, over the course of evolution, our body has found ways to remind us to protect that area.

Chris Jang, a tattoo artist at Black Fish Tattoo, a well-regarded shop in Manhattan, says she had a client "bail out" of the chair while getting a tattoo on their ribcage because they were in so much pain. "She was in tears."

Face and neck

Those who go the face or neck route are particularly dedicated to their tattoo choices, not only because whatever they put there will be seen by everyone they cross paths with, but also because the tattooing process can be particularly painful in those two areas, with relatively thin skin and lots of nerve endings in them.

Getting your lips tattooed can be especially agonizing because of the extreme number of nerve endings placed there. "The lips are an entryway to your mouth," says Cameron Rokhsar, a dermatologist and professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. They're especially sensitive because "you don't want to have anything going into your mouth that could be noxious to your body," and your lips and general mouth area do a good job of recognizing toxins.

Armpit

This feels like a random place on the body to mention, but people do choose armpit tats, and Jang says she's also dealt with clients who've had trouble getting inked in this particular place. Another area rife with nerve endings, the armpit is a low-pain-threshold-having individual's tattoo nightmare. The area also has a collection of lymph nodes in them, which, according to Mental Floss, "filter toxins out of tissues," so they must be particularly sensitive — and, thus, highly resistant to needle poking — so as to identify the toxins.

Hands and fingers

These areas are very sensitive, too. There are plenty of nerve endings in your hands and fingers, as Rokhsar explains, because we use our hands so much in understanding our environment through touch. Thinner skin in an area of the body allows for greater functional mobility, Ravitz says. Fingers are a prime example of this given the amount of time we spend moving them versus the amount of skin and flesh present on the bones.



Our hands also contain a lot of bones — 27 in each, to be precise — which, one artist told Refinery29, can feel “rattled” when getting a tattoo.

Kevin Garetz, a tattoo artist at Jersey City Tattoo, who estimates he’s had 70% of his body inked up, says the sides of the fingers are especially excruciating when getting tattooed. “I don’t even like to generally tattoo [people there] because it just doesn’t hold up over time,” Garetz says. “We wash our hands a lot and there’s just not a lot of skin or meat there to really take in the ink.”

Because of thin skin and boniness, the kneecap, feet, and ankles can also be challenging places to get tattoos. On clients getting knee cap tattoos, Garetz says, “I can’t get anybody through a session without cringing or taking a lot of breaks.”

So where should you get a tattoo if you don’t want to deal with a lot of pain?

Jang says the “outer parts of your body,” namely on the outer arms and outer thighs are the places you should get a tattoo if you only want to experience minimal pain. Those areas feature more fatty tissue to soften the blow of the needle. Garetz says he’s tattooed some athletes with more profound muscle tone, which helps with pain, too.



One tip Jang gives tattoo-seekers is to pinch different places of your body. The more painful the pinch is, the more painful that area will be to get a tattoo. If a client is experiencing too much pain and needs to stop a session, Garetz will ask them to at least get through the outlining portion and come back another day for coloring fill ins. "And when they come back usually they're more mentally prepared," he says.

Some people "psych themselves out" before arriving to a tattooing appointment, Garetz continues, anticipating a lot of pain and, to an extent, generating a self-fulfilling prophecy. So a person's mindset is a factor in the amount of pain they'll experience, as are the circumstances behind the tattoo, Garetz says. For instance, if a person is getting a tattoo for "therapeutic" purposes, like working through the death of a loved one by honoring them in permanent ink, that could give the client greater impetus to deal with the pain more steadfastly.

"The artist themselves might be a little heavy handed," as well, Garetz says. If this wasn't obvious already, it's therefore a good idea to research client experiences before booking an appointment with an artist. But ultimately, every client's pain threshold is different. "I've said to people, 'This is gonna hurt,' and then it doesn't hurt," Garetz says.

So if you want to get a tattoo, think on it, then think some more, pinch yourself, and get in the chair.