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# How to Get Rid of It

By Sonia Zjawinski



AP; Jeff Vespa  
Wire Image)

**W**e've all made mistakes, but erasing them hasn't always been easy. Not so long ago, the only options were barbaric and scarring: cutting out the offending tissue or sandblasting it off. Then, in 1963, Dr. Leon Goldman discovered the effective, yet still painful, erasing capabilities of Q-switched lasers. It wasn't until the early nineties, though, that the technique made it into doctors' offices.

Q-switched lasers emit a quick and intense pulse of light that penetrates the skin, fragmenting ink into smaller particles that are then either removed by the lymphatic system or eaten by tissue cells. Each pass of the laser removes roughly 20 percent of the ink, meaning multiple visits are necessary. Three crystal types are mainly used now—ruby, garnet, and alexandrite—each tuned to different wavelengths and spot sizes. Here, the strengths and weaknesses of each.

**Q-switched ruby:** This laser works best on black, green, and blue inks, but it also breaks down melanin, causing temporary skin whitening, especially in people with darker skin tones. The bleaching effect tends to fade in a year or so.

**Q-switched garnet:** A green laser ideal for dark skin, as the wavelength isn't absorbed by melanin and won't bleach skin. Drawback: It's only effective on dark-blue and black inks. Adding a frequency-doubling crystal shortens the wavelength to better deal with red, orange, and purple, but this can cause the residual ink to turn black or blue for a few days, and can lighten skin.


**Q-switched alexandrite:** An infrared laser most effective on black, blue, and green inks. When used in conjunction with a pulse dye laser—often used on its own to remove sun-damage spots—red inks can also be zapped.

Whom to see: Dr. Sue Ann Wee at the Tribeca Skin Center (315 Church St., nr. Lispenard St., second fl.; 212-334-3774) and Dr. Melanie Grossman (161 Madison Ave., nr. 33rd St., Ste. 4NW; 212-725-8600) are recognized removal experts.

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