

# Nipple-areola tattooing

**This leaflet explains more about nipple-areola tattooing (micro-pigmentation), including the benefits, risks and any alternatives and what you can expect when you come to the hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## What is nipple-areola tattooing?

Nipple-areola tattooing restores colour to the areola (the area around the nipple) to help achieve symmetry and a more natural result – finishing your reconstruction pathway.

## Why should I have nipple-areola tattooing?

The choice to have nipple-areola tattooing is yours. The aim of this procedure is to improve the cosmetic appearance of the breast by creating, as closely as possible, a nipple-areola that matches the existing nipple, or for double mastectomies creating areolas the colour of your choice. This will help improve body image and boost self-esteem.

## How can I prepare for nipple-areola tattooing?

Once you have agreed with your consultant that you would like to have this treatment, you will be referred to the breast reconstruction clinical nurse specialist team.

You will be sent a letter for an appointment with the clinical nurse specialist and the nipple-areola tattooing is carried out in an outpatient clinic room.

## What are the risks?

- Not achieving exact colour match.
- Uneven pigment colour.
- Infection post-procedure if instructions are not followed.
- Scarring.
- Slight skin irritation or allergy to pigment (a patch test can be carried out).
- Bleeding – a small amount from the needle puncturing skin.

## Are there any alternatives?

Silicone nipple-areola prostheses can be used.

## Patch testing

It is very unlikely that you would develop an allergic reaction to the pigments used in micro-pigmentation. However, if you have any known allergies, the nurse may advise you to undergo a skin allergy test at least 24 hours before carrying out the procedure. This would involve applying a small amount of the pigment to be used to your skin. If there is a reaction it will usually occur within 24 hours and it may not be safe to undergo tattooing.

## What happens during nipple-areola tattooing?

The nurse will discuss the colour and size with you and an outline of the areola will be drawn on with the pigment. When you are happy with the colour and size the nurse will apply the pigment (colour) to the skin using a pen-like device.

The pigment will be inserted into the skin with needles in the pen-like device: they move very fast and enter the skin at a depth of 2-3mm. There are several techniques which can be used to build up colour and to give the 'illusion of protrusion' for patients who want a 3D effect. The procedure will take approximately 30 minutes to complete but can vary with each individual. A non-stick dressing will then be applied to the area to prevent rubbing from your bra.

## Will I feel any pain?

Due to the breast reconstruction, the area to be tattooed is usually numb so no pain will be felt. If the area has sensation, a numbing cream can be applied to the area before the procedure is carried out.

## Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. You will also be asked to consent to having pre and post-procedure photographs.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will require a follow-up six to eight weeks after the initial treatment. Following an assessment the nurse will discuss with you if further pigment is necessary. It is usual to require two treatments as the colour will fade over time and a further procedure may be required to achieve and maintain desired colour. You will then be discharged from the plastic surgery department. As the tattoo fades over time, your GP can refer you back to the department if colour renewal is needed.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact the breast reconstruction clinical nurse specialist team, **t:** 07717 694 218, or **t:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for extension 53267. You can also bleep a member of the team by calling **t:** 020 7188 7188 and asking for the bleep desk, then ask for bleep 1993.

Alternatively, you can email us at **e:** [BreastReconstructionNurses@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:BreastReconstructionNurses@gstt.nhs.uk).

For appointment queries, please contact the plastic surgery access team, **t:** 020 7188 8882.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets).

**Leaflet number: 4702/VER1**

Date published: March 2019

Review date: March 2022

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A list of sources is available on request