



Nipple and Areola Micro-Pigmentation (page 1 of 4)

What is micro-pigmentation?

Micro-pigmentation (is tattooing) to create a semi-permanent image of an areola and/or nipple for patients who have had breast reconstruction surgery.

The procedure is carried out by a trained nurse practitioner who works within the Breast Team. Pigment is applied to the top layer of the skin with a small electronic machine which uses a cluster of fine needles to implant semi-permanent colour (pigment). These needles are sterile and disposable.

You can be referred to the service by your plastic surgeon or GP.

How long will it take?

You can expect to be with us for about an hour on your initial visit, then for about 30 minutes for any other treatments depending on whether we are adding colour to one or both breasts.

Most patients require one treatment followed by a second appointment to build up the pigment colour. Possible follow-up treatments may be required if the pigment fades. Time scales for future top-ups vary from person to person.

What is the benefit of having this procedure?

The aim of nipple and areola tattooing is to improve the aesthetic appearance of the breast by recreating, as closely as possible, a nipple and areola that mimics the existing nipple and areola (if applicable). This improves body image and boosts self-esteem.

Are there any risks involved with this procedure?

100% satisfaction cannot be guaranteed and the extent of the success of the treatment depends on your expectations, your skin type and the tattooing method the practitioner uses.

We use a semi-permanent pigment which is safe to use for patients following breast reconstruction, the pigment may fade over time. You may also experience the following:

- pigment may spread slightly outside the treated area
- uneven pigment area

Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurse Specialists
Tel: 01722 336262 Ext 3156

If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: customer care@salisbury.nhs.uk

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

Please complete The Friends & Family Test to tell us about your experience at: www.salisbury.nhs.uk/FriendsFamily or download our App from the Apple App store or Google Play Store.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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- not achieving an exact match to your natural nipple & areola

As with any clinical procedure, tattooing is not without risk. These include:

- discomfort during treatment
- allergy to pigment
- scarring
- bleeding
- infection
- flattening of a reconstructed nipple
- granuloma (nodules and lumps).

Are there factors that may affect the result?

The result of micro-pigmentation is partly determined by individual skin type but can also be affected by:

- natural skin overtones
- skin characteristics (dryness, oiliness, sun damage, acidity)
- medication
- lifestyle, such as alcohol, smoking, swimming or Jacuzzi
- individual healing ability
- presence of any scars.

What can I expect to happen during the procedure?

First the nurse will go through your medical history to find out if you have any allergies or any indications that would mean the procedure could not be done. If you have allergies to any skin products, hair dyes or metals you will be offered a skin patch-test. This involves applying a small amount of pigment with a needle to a small inconspicuous area. We will then ask you to contact the Macmillan breast reconstruction nurse specialists in 24 to 48 hours with the result. You may wish to proceed with the tattooing despite having allergies and knowing the risks, in which case you will be asked to sign a 'patch-test waiver' form.

The nurse will go through the risks and benefits, answer any questions you may have and if you are keen to proceed they will ask you to sign a consent form to undertake the procedure.

Patient participation in choosing colour and size for the areola and nipple is very important. As part of your consultation with the nurse practitioner you will be asked to stand in front of a mirror in order to determine the area of breast to be treated. With your involvement a pigment colour will be chosen to best match the shade of your other nipple and areola (if applicable). If you are having both breasts tattooed the nurse will help you choose a colour that closely matches your pre-operative photographs (if available) or one that suits your skin-tone.

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Once you are happy with the size, shape and colour, the nurse practitioner will guide the machine and tattoo 'pen' over the skin, gradually building-up the colour effect. There are many techniques for applying a tattoo and the nurse will select the most appropriate. Three layers of pigment will be applied.

The tattoo process usually takes about 30 minutes to complete per breast.

For the first few days the colour may appear 20-30% darker and brighter than the final result.

The procedure should not be painful, although some tingling and discomfort is usually expected. Most patients are numb in their breast area, however if you have any sensation in the areola area please contact a Macmillan breast reconstruction nurse on the number below for advice. Occasionally patients need a local anaesthetic cream applied 45-60 minutes prior to the procedure to numb the area if they have sensation and rarely a local anaesthetic injection needs to be given by a doctor. Patients with implants may feel a vibration through the implant during treatment.

When the procedure is finished petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) will be applied over the area with a dressing and you will be reminded of the aftercare and asked to make a follow-up appointment (if necessary).

With your consent photographs will be taken as part of your medical record. The nurse may advise you to arrive 15-20 minutes early at your next tattoo appointment and go directly to the photographic department, this ensures photos are taken at all stages of your journey.

Aftercare

- Your practitioner will advise you of your wound aftercare following your procedure.
- You may experience temporary swelling/redness for the first day or two.
- Crusting/scabbing may occur on the areola area. This is a normal part of the healing process, and it is important not to pick at it as it may pull out the pigment and cause infection or scarring.
- You can use clean kitchen-roll paper or gauze after showering to pat the area dry until it has fully healed.
- We recommend that you do not swim, sunbathe, or use a sauna or jacuzzi for two weeks after the procedure to prevent pigment changes; the chlorine can act as bleach and cause changes/fading in the pigment. After this time a thin layer of petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) will create a barrier from the chlorine.
- You will be given a follow up appointment for the second treatment. At this appointment the nurse practitioner will assess the appearance of the areola and apply further pigment as necessary.
- You may need further sessions in the future as over time the tattoo may fade. Please ask your GP to refer you to the Macmillan breast reconstruction nurse specialists so that further sessions can be arranged. Your GP will receive a copy of the letter each time you attend an appointment, this has details of the tattooing and pigment colours used.

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- Some pigment colours contain a trace of iron oxide. If you have a CT or MRI scan, you will need to tell the scanning technician about your tattoo so that they can assess the risk of side-effects as there have been reports of burns/tingling to the tattooed area.
- if you feel unwell, develop a raised temperature, swelling, bruising, rash or tenderness over the area please do not hesitate to contact us or seek medical advice.

Further questions

For further information or if you have any queries please contact:

Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurse Specialists

Tel: 01722 336262 Ext 3156 (answer machine available)

Out-of-hours please contact:

Burns and Plastics 01722 336262 ext 3507.

If I need to change my appointment?

The tattoo clinics are very popular and book up very quickly, waiting times can be long. If you are unable to attend an appointment or change your mind please telephone and cancel at least 24 hours before your appointment so another patient can then take your place.

Central Booking: 01722 429324

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