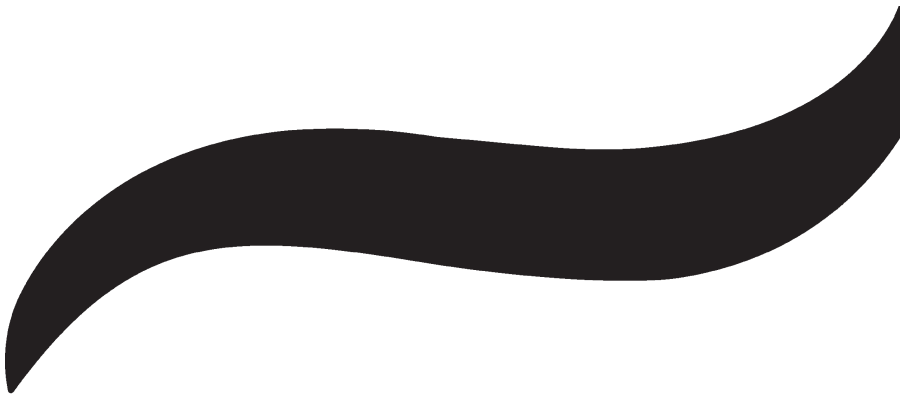




Tattooing

Information for patients
Surgery Department



INTRODUCTION

The majority of women who undergo mastectomy will lose their nipple and areola. Once you have had your breast reconstructed and your wounds have healed properly, you will be offered the opportunity to have the nipple and areola restored using a procedure known as tattooing.

This is an invasive procedure which uses needles to place pigments or inks under the skin. A trained and experienced person will perform the procedure but it is not without risk.

It is neither essential nor necessary to undergo surgical nipple reconstruction in order to have the tattooing performed as the tattooed nipple will have a 3D effect.

The main risks include:

- ❖ Failure to achieve an exact colour match
- ❖ Fading of colour over time
- ❖ Scarring
- ❖ Pigment migration or spreading
- ❖ Uneven pigment colour
- ❖ Slight skin irritation
- ❖ Infection.

You will be responsible for determining the position, size and colour of your tattoo in consultation with the tattooist.

When can it be done and how long will it take?

Tattooing can be performed once the wound has healed and the swelling has subsided. Generally this takes around 4-6 months after completion of reconstructive surgery.

The initial appointment usually lasts approximately 60-90 minutes with follow-ups usually lasting about 30 minutes.

The procedure will be explained and a colour match performed before deciding on appropriate placement of the tattoo. Most women require more than one appointment to obtain a satisfactory result. The tattoo will fade with time, but this generally happens after years rather than months. Touch-ups can be arranged if required.

WHAT FACTORS MAY AFFECT THE RESULTS?

The end result is partially determined by differences in skin type and can be affected by:

- ❖ Medication
- ❖ Natural skin overtones
- ❖ Skin characteristics (scarring, dryness, oiliness, sun damage, thickness, and colour)
- ❖ PH balance of the skin (acidity)
- ❖ Alcohol intake
- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Individual healing ability
- ❖ Illness.

ALLERGY TO TATTOO PIGMENTS/INKS

The pigments and inks that we use are very safe and an allergic reaction is very rare. Testing for allergies is not generally helpful, as a reaction can take months or years to manifest itself. An allergic reaction is also unlikely to occur with the colours that we use.

Equipment

The tattoo machine is cleaned thoroughly as per manufacturers instructions before and after each use. The needle cartridges are disposable and discarded after each use.

The procedure

The tattooing usually takes 60 to 90 minutes depending on individual requirements. Completion time varies according to:

- ❖ The position and size of the nipple/areola
- ❖ The depth of colour
- ❖ Skin type/amount of scarring

The pigment or ink is applied using a small tattoo machine: the needles move up and down very quickly, penetrating the upper layers of the skin, known as epidermis and dermis, and implanting the pigment under the skin.

It is not very common to experience pain during the procedure as the skin is usually numb following reconstruction however you may experience a tingling in the back or stomach depending on the type of reconstruction you have. Local anaesthetic cream can be applied prior to the procedure if required.

Most patients require two or three initial treatments but further follow-up treatments may be needed to achieve and maintain the desired outcome.

Occasionally, it is necessary to tattoo the skin of your breast above or below the reconstruction flap due to the size of your areola or position of the nipple reconstruction.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT AFTER THE PROCEDURE?

Slight swelling and redness will occur over the tattooed area and the skin may feel 'tight'. These symptoms should settle within seven days depending on how sensitive your skin is. Paracetamol should relieve any discomfort.

You should be able to resume normal activities immediately following the procedure. Use of deodorants, activities that lead to excessive perspiration or exposure of the affected area to the sun should be avoided until the tattoo is fully healed.

If you swim and the tattoo is in contact with chlorine or saltwater during the healing phase, the pigment is at risk of bleaching.

Over the first few days, the tattooed area will form a scab. This will last for up to three weeks after which it will fall away as the tattoo heals. Initially the tattoo will appear darker but the the pigment will fade and the colour will soften over four weeks.

Let the healing process take its natural course. Scarring and loss of colour can occur if the scabs are removed or knocked off prematurely.

A poor colour match is usually the most common problem that occurs. However remember the tattoo will fade through time and can be corrected.

SKIN CARE INSTRUCTIONS

The following instructions must be carefully followed for at least two weeks after procedure to encourage successful results.

1. To prevent infection, do not touch the tattooed area with your fingers until it is completely healed. Use cotton buds to apply ointments.
2. The recommended ointment is Bepanthen. This is a commonly used treatment for nappy rash but its soothing effects help the skin heal without the colour fading.
3. Keep the area uncovered as much as possible and use the Bepanthen ointment regularly to help the healing process.
4. If a scab appears on the tattoo, do not pick it off, as this could affect the final results by removing pigment.
5. Do not use soap on the tattoo, sunbathe, swim, sauna or Jacuzzi for two weeks following both the initial and follow up procedures.

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