

# Nipple-areola Tattoo

## Patient Information

### What is a nipple-areola tattoo?

- Nipple-areola tattoo is the implantation of small amounts of pigment (dye) into the skin to create the colour of the nipple and areola (the brown area around the nipple).
- This is usually performed in patients who have had a breast reconstruction and after the nipple itself has been reconstructed.
- The procedure is performed by a doctor who, with your choice and preferences, matches the colour by eye.
- It is important to note that it is not possible to get a 100% colour match with the other nipple. The colour is also likely to change over time. The colour will often lighten and patients may need top up treatments to achieve and maintain the desired colour.

### What are the benefits of having a nipple-areola tattoo?

The aim of nipple-areola tattoo is to give you a colour match for your reconstructed nipple-areola that is as realistic as possible.

We aim to match it to your remaining nipple or, for double mastectomy, to your choice of colour.

### What are the risks involved in having a nipple-areola tattoo?

The most common complications of having a nipple-areola tattoo are:-

- Bleeding – as with any procedure that punctures the skin.
- Infection – this can be treated with antibiotics.

- Scarring of the area if the scab doesn't heal properly.

Uncommon complications are:-

- The colour may not be a perfect match.
- Colour spreading from the original position.
- Fading of the colour over time.
- Uneven pigment colour over the areola.

**If you are worried about any of these risks, please speak to your Consultant or a member of their team.**

### Are there any alternatives to a nipple-areola tattoo?

Yes, you could decide to have a prosthetic (false) nipple-areola.

### What will happen if I decide not to have treatment?

Nothing. You can have a nipple-areola tattoo at a later date if you change your mind.

### What sort of anaesthetic will be given to me?

Most women have decreased sensation in the area to be treated due to previous surgery and do not need local anaesthetic.

### What should I expect before the procedure?

The procedure is carried out in the outpatient clinic and you can expect to be there for about one hour.

This is a good opportunity for you to ask questions about the procedure, but please feel free to discuss any concerns you have at any time.

### **What should I expect during the procedure?**

The pigment (colour) is applied to the skin using a pen-like device with small needles.

The needles move up and down very fast, penetrating the outer and inner layers of the skin (the epidermis and dermis), implanting the coloured pigments.

The doctor holds the pen-like device and guides along the skin to build up colour.

The length of time it takes to complete the procedure varies with each individual and also depends on the size of the area to be coloured. You should allow one hour for the procedure.

### **What should I expect after the procedure?**

You may experience slight swelling and redness to the area following the procedure. These symptoms will subside within one to seven days.

A dressing will be applied over the area and you should keep it dry and intact for 24 hours.

You should be able to resume normal activities following the procedure.

However we recommend that you do not swim, sunbathe / use sun beds, use a sauna or jacuzzi and avoid excessive perspiration for two weeks following the procedure to prevent pigment changes and allow the area to heal.

You may notice slight fading of the pigment and softening of the colour.

### **Factors that can affect the result**

- Natural skin overtones.
- Individual skin characteristics.
- Individual healing ability.
- Excessive exposure to chlorine (e.g. swimming pool water).
- Excessive exposure to saltwater (e.g. sea water).
- Sunbathing/sun beds.
- Excessive use of soap.
- Removal of scab.
- Smoking.

### **When will I be able to go home?**

You will be able to leave hospital as soon as the treatment is over.

### **What skin care instructions should I follow after the procedure?**

The following instructions **must** be followed for at least two weeks after the procedure to ensure successful results.

- Keep the area dry for 48 hours.
- You may wish to cover the tattoo with a protective dressing during the day and uncover it while sleeping, but do not sleep on your stomach. This protects the tissues and helps healing.
- If a crust/scab appears, do not pick or peel it off as this may remove the pigment as well as the crust/scab.
- To prevent infection, try not to touch the coloured area with your fingers until it is completely healed.

### **Will I need any further treatment?**

You will be given an appointment to come back to a follow up clinic. At this time we can check your progress and discuss with you any further treatment we recommend.

You may need further sessions in the future, as over a period of time, the area may fade. This can be arranged by contacting the Breast Care Team.

## Will I need pain relief and medication?

Many patients do not need any pain relief following the procedure, but simple painkillers that you can buy in the pharmacy should be enough.

## When can I return to work?

It is probably wise to have the rest of the day off, but you should be able to go to work the following day.

## Further Information

The information in this leaflet is of a general nature. Further individual information will be provided by your Surgeon and Breast Care Nurse.

Breast Unit Reception: 0151 529 4089  
Breast Care Nurses: 0151 529 4082

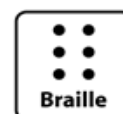
Further information is also available from the following national support groups.

## National Support Groups

[www.breastcancercareorg.uk](http://www.breastcancercareorg.uk)

[www.breakthrough.org.uk](http://www.breakthrough.org.uk)

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)



### If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

**Tel No: 0151 529 2906**

**Email: [interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk](mailto:interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk)**