



**Queen Victoria Hospital**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Nipple and Areola Micro-Pigmentation



## What is micropigmentation?

Micropigmentation (tattooing) is used 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.

## 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 initial treatment followed by a second appointment to build up the pigment colour. Possible follow-up treatments in the future may be required if the pigment fades. Time scales for future top ups varies from person to person.

## What is the expected benefit of having this procedure?

The aim of nipple and areola micropigmentation 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 has a positive effect of improving body image and boosting 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 what expectations are desired, the skin type of the patient and the method the practitioner deems appropriate. As we use a semi-permanent pigment which has been tested as 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
- not achieving an exact match to your natural nipple & areola

As with any clinical procedure, micro-pigmentation is not without risk. These include:

- discomfort during treatment
- allergy to pigment
- scarring
- bleeding
- infection
- flattening of a reconstructed nipple

## Are there factors that may affect the result?

The result of micropigmentation 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?

At the beginning of the consultation the nurse will go through your medical history to determine whether you have any allergies or any indications that would prohibit performing the procedure. 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 (bilateral) 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.

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 method they deem appropriate.

The tattoo process usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete per breast.

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

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 require a topical 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 (i.e. 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).

If it is your initial appointment and you have consented to having photos taken, you may be given a photograph form. The nurse may advise you to arrive 15-20 minutes prior to your next tattoo appointment and go directly to the photography department, this ensures photos are taken at all stages of your journey for your medical records.

## 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 may 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. After this time a thin layer of petroleum jelly (i.e. Vaseline) will create a barrier from the chlorine which can act as bleach and cause changes/fading in the pigment.
- You will be given a follow up appointment for the second treatment. The nurse practitioner will then assess the appearance of the areola and apply further pigment as necessary.
- You may need further sessions in the future as, over a period of 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 pigment colours used.

## Tattooing, CT scans, MRI

Some pigment colours contain a trace of iron oxide. If you have a CT or MRI scan, you will need to tell the radiographer 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.

## Further questions

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

**Macmillan Breast Reconstruction  
Nurse Specialists**

Monday to Friday  
(answer machine available)

Tel: 01342 414302  
01342 414606  
01342 414163  
01342 414793

Email: [qvh.breastcare@nhs.net](mailto:qvh.breastcare@nhs.net)

## What 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 may be offered your appointment.

**Outpatients Appointment Line**

Tel: 01342 414141

If you'd like to find out how you can support QVH,  
please visit [www.supportqvh.org](http://www.supportqvh.org)



Please ask if you  
would like this leaflet  
in larger print or an  
alternative format.

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