

## Further information

Information on who to contact, i.e. web sites / telephone numbers of other departments / organisations which may be of help.

### How to contact us

#### Breast Care Unit

#### St Albans City Hospital

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**West Hertfordshire  
Hospitals**  
NHS Trust



# A guide to...

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# Nipple areola micro-pigmentation (Tattooing)

## *Patient information*

### **Breast Care Unit**

Watford General Hospital

Hemel Hempstead Hospital

St Albans City Hospital

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## Introduction

Nipple areola tattooing (micro-pigmentation) is performed after reconstruction of the breast is completed. This is an invasive procedure using needles to place pigments under the skin, this procedure can give the illusion of an areola and colour the reconstructed nipple, the colour is only semi-permanent. This cannot be undertaken until at least 3 months have passed following reconstruction.

It is not essential to undergo the nipple reconstruction to be entitled to tattooing, some patients decide to have tattooing to create a 3D effect without the reconstruction.

It can also be performed to correct areola loss/asymmetry following breast surgery.

Although care is taken to closely match the size and colour of the nipple/areola, the procedure is your choice and not medically necessary therefore it must be appreciated that a perfect match cannot be guaranteed.

A specialist nurse will perform the procedure.

## Benefits

The aim of the procedure is to improve the cosmetic appearance of the breast by optimally matching the size and colour to the opposite nipple areola (if unilateral). A perfect colour match cannot be guaranteed as pigment choices vary and it is difficult to get the exact colouring.

If you have undergone bilateral reconstruction you will be able to determine the size and colour independent of a match.

Many patients find that the procedure improves their body image and quality of life, thus boosting their self esteem.

## Risks

This is an invasive procedure and therefore not without risk.

The main risks include:

- Allergy to the pigment (patch test carried out at least 48 hours prior to the procedure)
- Colour mismatch
- Fading of the tattoo over time
- Uneven pigment colour
- Infection
- Bleeding (initially after procedure)
- Scarring
- Skin irritation
- Some discomfort during and post procedure

## Factors affecting the results

- Medication
- Natural skin tones
- Skin characteristics such as; dryness, oily skin, sun damage, thickness and acidity of the skin
- Alcohol intake
- Smoking
- Individual healing ability

## Prior to the procedure

This is performed in the breast care clinic at St Albans City Hospital by the Specialist Breast Care Nurse.

You will be seen for an appointment prior to the procedure to choose the pigment that closely matches your other nipple areola, if having bilateral procedure you can choose any colour that you wish.

Once the colour is chosen a patch test will be performed, this is to determine if you have an allergy to the pigment used, a small amount of pigment is placed onto your skin and covered with a waterproof dressing, you need to leave this in place for 24 hours.

You can then wash off the pigment and observe the skin for any reaction. You **MUST** contact the breast care nurse to alert her of any reaction/allergy to the pigment.

## On the day of the procedure

In consultation with the Specialist Breast Care Nurse you will be responsible for determining the position, size and shape of the nipple areola. The area will be marked and a local anaesthetic cream will be applied to the area for approximately 1 hour, this is to topically numb the skin as the procedure can sometimes be uncomfortable dependent on which reconstruction you have had.

You will be asked general questions about your health and to sign a consent form prior to the procedure. The length of time it takes to perform the procedure is dependant on the size and if unilateral or bilateral areas are tattooed but approx it will take 30-40 minutes per nipple areola.

You will be asked to lie on the examination couch whilst the procedure is performed. The equipment used is sterile and all needles are single use only.

A special pen-like device with tiny needles moves up and down quickly to impregnate the pigment into the outer layers of the skin surface. The speed and power is adjusted according to your specific skin type, different techniques are used to build up the colour effect.

Immediately following the procedure bleeding and leakage of serous fluid can be expected. If you have an implant, chloramphenicol ointment will be applied to the skin with a dry dressing. If you have had reconstruction without an implant, Vaseline ointment can be applied with a dry dressing.

## Aftercare following the procedure

Your breast may initially appear pink/red with some swelling around the area, this is a normal reaction. It may also appear tight, these symptoms should subside but if you are worried please contact the Specialist Breast Care Nurse for advice.

You must not shower for 2 days following the procedure. The ointment must be applied daily with a fresh dressing for the next 2-3 days or until the area has dried up. The dressings will be supplied.

After 2 days you can shower but do not rub or scrub the area involved, just let the shower water run over the area. An application of Vaseline to protect the area can be applied prior to showering.

Tiny scabs will appear from the bleeding/oozing that has occurred, **DO NOT** pick or peel these off or the colour will come away with it.

Initially the colour will appear darker due to the bleeding and scabbing, it may take up to 2 weeks for all the scabs to fall off and over the next 6 weeks the colour will fade slightly to its final colour.

**DO NOT** sunbathe, swim, use a sauna or Jacuzzi for the initial 2 weeks following tattooing, all these can 'bleach' the colour out.

To prevent infection it is advisable to use cotton buds to apply the ointment rather than your fingers.

## Further appointments

A follow up appointment will be made to see you approximately one week after the initial tattooing, this will be to check on how it is healing and whether the pigment and colour is a good match.

Sometimes further tattooing is required if it appears uneven or the colour is not a good match. You will have to wait 6 weeks before further tattooing is performed.

6 weeks is the time it takes for the pigment to settle to its final colour. Over time the tattoo will fade and this is natural as it is semi permanent, therefore 'top up' tattoos are required in the future, this generally is after 2-3 years.

## Important information

Laser hair removal from the treated area can alter the colour of the pigment used and therefore should be avoided.

If you are having an MRI or CAT scan in the future please advise the radiologist of your medical tattoo as this can cause artifact on the scan. You may also feel a slight tingling of the treated area whilst the scan is being carried out.

## Contact details

If you have any questions about this service please contact the Specialist Breast Care Nurse – who will be performing the procedure.

She can be contacted on: **01727 897 562**