

Breast services

Having nipple areola micropigmentation (nipple tattooing)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to give you information about nipple areola micropigmentation. We hope it will answer some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have at this time. This booklet is not meant to replace the consultation between you and your medical team but aims to help you understand more about what is discussed.

What is micropigmentation?

Micropigmentation is a non-surgical procedure very similar to tattooing. It is the implantation of small amounts of natural pigment (dye) via a needle into the surface layer of the skin. It creates semi-permanent pigmentation (colour) in the area treated. The effect may fade over several years, but it will not disappear completely.

Micropigmentation does not go into the skin as deeply as tattooing and the pigments and techniques are specifically designed for the breast.

Nipple areola micropigmentation

After breast reconstruction, in order for the nipple and the surrounding area (areola) to look as natural as possible, patients can have the new nipple and areola 'tattooed'. This is called nipple areola micropigmentation. Patients usually need two treatments (given four weeks apart) to achieve and maintain the desired result. The aim of this procedure is to improve the cosmetic appearance of the breast.

The colour used to match the nipple and areola of your natural breast will be decided between yourself and the healthcare professional. The colour will fade over time but should last for a few years. You may wish to repeat the procedure in the future. It is important to know that sometimes it is not possible to match the exact colour of your nipple.

Are there any risks?

The procedure will be carried out by an experienced healthcare professional. There are only minor risks; these are:

- scarring
- pigment spreading slightly outside the treated area
- uneven pigment colour
- slight skin irritation
- allergic reaction to the pigments
- skin infection

What factors may affect the results?

The appearance of the new nipple and areola will depend on your skin and may be affected by:

- medication
- natural skin colour
- skin features such as dryness, oiliness, sun damage, thickness, colour, acidity
- alcohol intake
- smoking
- individual healing ability
- illness
- keloid scars (overgrown lumpy scars which can feel hard and rubbery)

If you have a heart condition, epilepsy, blood clotting problem, HIV or you have had hepatitis over the past 12 months, you must inform the healthcare professional before having the procedure.

If you have a history of developing keloid scars it may not be possible for you to undergo this procedure. Please contact the breast clinical nurse specialist (CNS) via the Macmillan navigator service using the contact number listed on page 4 to discuss this.

The procedure

The healthcare professional will complete a short assessment form with you about your general health. They will then ask you to sign a consent form before carrying out the procedure.

The area to be coloured will be marked by the healthcare professional with a pen. The position and colour will be checked with you.

The micropigmentation procedure usually takes 30-60 minutes, depending on factors such as:

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- the position, width and depth of the nipple and size of the areola
 - the darkness of colour to be matched
 - whether the skin readily accepts the pigment

The pigment is applied using a pen-like device, the tiny needles move up and down, penetrating the skin and placing the pigment in its upper layer, just below the surface. The pigments are built up using dots, lines and/or a circular motion. All the equipment used is sterile. Needles are used once for each individual procedure and then disposed of immediately.

Most people do not have any sensation or feeling in the area being treated because of their previous reconstruction surgery. However if you find the procedure painful, please let us know and an anaesthetic cream can be applied to the area.

Before you leave, we will give you a second appointment which will be around four weeks after the first treatment. At this follow-up appointment, your healthcare professional will assess the appearance of the areola and nipple and apply further pigmentation if necessary.

What should you expect after the procedure?

You will experience slight swelling and redness and the skin may feel 'tight'. These symptoms may last between one and seven days, depending on the sensitivity of your skin. You should be able to resume normal activities immediately after the procedure; however, use of cosmetic skin products, excessive perspiration and exposure of the affected area to the sun should be avoided until the area is fully healed.

Over the first few days the pigmented area of skin will form a scab. As the skin heals (this usually takes two to three weeks), the scab will fall off and the colour will fade. It is important to let the skin heal naturally, and not pick the scab off, as this may cause scarring or colour loss.

Skin care instructions

The following instructions must be carefully followed for at least two weeks after the procedure in order to ensure successful results:

- the treated area will have been covered with a plaster by your healthcare professional – the plaster should remain in place for at least two days after your procedure
- do not touch the area for two days following your procedure and during this time do not get the area wet
- every morning and evening apply petroleum jelly (such as Vaseline) to the area using a cotton bud until the sachet you were given is finished - then put your bra on as usual
- before showering or bathing, apply a small amount of petroleum jelly to the areola - this protects it and means water will not affect the area
- try not to sleep facing downwards
- do not pick or peel off the scab that appears on the areola during healing - this will remove the pigment as well as the scab and cause scarring

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- do not use soap, sunbathe, swim, sauna or use a Jacuzzi
 - avoid using perfumed or chemically based products, exfoliating agents, sun creams or fake tans
 - to prevent infection, do not touch the pigmented area with your fingers until it is completely healed - use cotton buds when applying petroleum jelly

If you have prolonged soreness, swelling or redness, or if you have any questions and need further information, please contact your breast CNS via the Macmillan navigator service.

Contacting the hospital

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust has a Macmillan navigator service for access to your CNS and other members of the clinical team. Navigators can also help with queries and provide a range of other information, help and support relating to your care. The service is available Monday to Friday 08.30–16.30 (excluding bank holidays). Telephone: **020 3313 0303**

Other sources of information and support

Macmillan Cancer information and support service at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

The Macmillan information and support service provides free, confidential support and information to those affected by cancer. Our service offers the opportunity to talk to one of our team one-on-one about whatever matters most to you, as well as a range of weekly groups that provide the opportunity to connect with other patients in a relaxed environment. Our Macmillan Benefits adviser can also offer tailored advice on additional financial support.

We have physical centres at Charing Cross and Hammersmith Hospitals and also offer virtual and telephone support.

We are open Monday-Wednesday 8:00am-6:00pm and Thursday 8:00am-5.30pm (excluding bank holidays). Our physical centres' opening hours will vary.

For more information please call us on **020 3313 5170** or email [**imperial.macmillansupportservice@nhs.net**](mailto:imperial.macmillansupportservice@nhs.net)

Maggie's Cancer Caring Centre

Maggie's is a cancer charity that provides emotional, practical and social support that people with cancer may need. This drop-in centre combines striking buildings, calming spaces, professional experts offering support, and the ability to talk and share experiences with a community of people who have been through similar experiences. Maggie's West London is located in the grounds of Charing Cross Hospital but please note it is independent of our hospital. The centre is open Monday to Friday, 09.00-17.00. For more information please call 020 7386 1750.

Macmillan Cancer Support Helpline This is a free helpline for people affected by cancer who have questions about cancer, need support or just someone to talk to. It is open from Monday to Friday, 09.00–20.00 (interpretation service available). Telephone: 0808 808 0000

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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