

Nipple Tattoos Micropigmentation Reconstruction

Micropigmentation is also known as “tattooing.” During this procedure, small sterile needles are used to color the skin.

The needles make tiny holes that tunnel the color deep into the skin. Once the tiny holes heal, the color stays in the skin permanently.

The color is made from iron oxide. The Food and Drug Administration has approved many of the colors; however, the FDA does not approve the final product - the tattooing dye - at this time.



How are tattoos used with breast reconstruction?

Tattoos are used to create what looks like an areola. The areola is the colored part around the nipple of the breast.

Three-D (3-D) tattoos are also an option for some patients. Three-D tattoos use layers of shading and coloring to look like a nipple with an areola.

Will the color fade or can it be removed?

The tattoo is permanent. The color cannot be removed easily. At first, the color is darker, and then it fades to its permanent color after about 3 months. Touch-ups are usually needed within the first 6 months.

Over time, the color fades a little more because the skin sheds skin cells. Overall, the color usually lasts about 5 years and then needs to be redone.

Laser therapy may not be an option for tattoo removal.

Does insurance pay for the procedure?

Most insurance providers will pay for the tattoo procedure as the final step in breast reconstruction. In addition, there is a charge for touch-up procedures and insurance will usually cover this as well.

Who performs this procedure?

A registered nurse (RN) in the Center for Reconstructive Surgery is specially trained to perform this procedure.

Where do I get the tattoo, and how long does it take?

The procedure is done in an exam room and takes about 1 ½ hours for each breast. This time frame includes choosing the color and the actual procedure.

Sometimes, patients need more than one treatment. Most patients return to work the same day of the procedure.

Does it hurt?

You may feel some discomfort from the needle sticks. To help reduce any discomfort, we may apply a numbing cream to the area or you may get an injection of numbing medicine. You may also take an over-the-counter pain relief medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), to help manage any discomfort after the procedure and while you recover.

The injection of numbing medicine may affect how well the color is absorbed.

What are the benefits and possible risks?

The benefits of tattooing are the following:

- Most patients can return to their normal activities the same day or within 24 hours.
- When you are nude, the tattoo gives the appearance of a natural looking breast.
- The tattoo may distract one's attention from the reconstruction scars
- For most, it represents a sense of completion or wholeness.

Possible risks of tattooing are:

- Allergic reaction
- Skin infection, known as cellulitis
- Type of scar that is raised or firm
- Possible loss of breast implant
- Bleeding, damage to the hair follicles, or scarring
- Rupture or loss of implant
- Fading over time
- Bleeding of the colored dye beyond the procedure area
- May need to do the procedure again if the color does not absorb

It is also important to know that:

- The results may be affected if the area was previously treated with radiation or if there is scarring.
- The color could interfere with MRI scans.
- The tattoo is permanent. Laser therapy may not be able to remove the color.

Before Your Procedure

Before your procedure, tell your doctor or nurse if you take aspirin, aspirin-like products, anti-platelet medicines or blood thinners. Your doctor will tell you if you can keep taking these before your procedure. Do not stop these medicines without supervision from your doctor. Stopping these medicines on your own can be dangerous.

Also, tell your doctor or nurse if you:

- Are on steroid therapy
- Have a wound that has not healed or a recent body piercing
- Have a rash on your chest area
- Are sick, or have had a cold, or flu-like symptoms within the last 2 weeks
- Are scheduled to have dental work within a week of your procedure
- Have had an allergic reaction to make-up or hair dye
- Have had a recent herpes outbreak.

Day of Your Procedure

Please follow these guidelines on the day of your procedure:

1. Eat or drink as normal.
2. Leave your jewelry at home.
3. Wear loose-fitting clothing, and do not apply lotions or ointments to the chest area.

The steps of the procedure are as followed:

1. You will help choose the color for your tattoo
2. You will then undress and the nurse will sketch the tattoo area with a surgical marker.
3. You will put on a gown for the procedure and will lie down on the exam table.
4. A numbing medicine such as a cream or injection will be applied to the area if needed
5. Using a hollow needle that vibrates, the nurse applies the color into the top layer of the skin. Each time the needle goes into the skin, it releases a droplet of color into the hole.

You will feel some vibration and may feel a slight sting from the needle.

After Your Procedure

After your procedure, please be aware of the following information:

1. Your doctor will tell you when it is okay to take a shower. Most patients must wait at least 48 hours.
2. You are shown how to change the dressing around the nipple area and given special care instructions.
3. If needed, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) to help with any pain.
4. At first, the color may look dark and shiny. Your skin may have some mild swelling or redness around the area which should go away within a few days.
5. You will apply ointment twice a day for 5 days to help prevent infection as well as moisturizing the area. Your surgeon will give you specific wound care instructions.
6. A scab may form around the area. Do not pick at or scrub the scab. It will fall off by itself with time. Once the scab has fallen off, you will begin to see the final tattoo.

Patient Education



For the next 14 days, DO NOT:

- Cuddle with your pets
- Garden or do any yard work
- Do any kind of physical activity that may cause your chest area to sweat or become dirty
- Submerge or sit in water above your chest in the bathtub
- Swim or use a hot tub/Jacuzzi® or sauna.

You may return to work the same day and should be able to drive after the procedure.

Questions or Concerns

Please call your nurse if you have a rash or an open wound on your chest, arms or abdomen.

For non-emergencies during business hours, please call your plastic surgery provider.