



What is nipple tattooing?

Nipple tattooing is a semi-permanent way of replacing colour to the nipple areola region post breast reconstruction. Small amounts of natural iron oxide pigment are added into the skin to provide the areola region with a more natural appearance.

How do I access this service?

To access the Nurse-led Nipple Tattooing Clinic you must be a patient of The Breast Service, a joint service of the Royal Women's Hospital and the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Your breast plastic surgeon or breast surgeon will refer you to the breast care nurse when you are ready for nipple tattooing and your name will be placed on the clinic waiting list. An appointment letter with information about your procedure will be sent to you.

The breast care nurse will contact you prior to your tattoo procedure. She will ask about your medical history and explain the procedure to you. This can usually be done over the phone, if needed an appointment to attend The Breast Clinic will be arranged.

About the procedure

The process of micro-pigmentation (tattooing) involves putting small amounts of pigment into your skin with a specially designed hand-held motorised instrument and a group of sterile, single use needles. An appropriate pigment colour and position for your tattoo will be decided on by you and the breast care nurse.

The area to be tattooed will be cleaned with an antiseptic fluid solution and the tattooing will begin. You may notice a slight vibration and some women do notice some mild discomfort.

Please allow up to two hours for your appointment, the treatment itself will take approximately 30 minutes per nipple.

The procedure is carried out in Women's Health Clinics on the first floor of the Royal Women's Hospital by the breast care nurse.

Important things to do before your nipple tattoo

1. You must let the breast care nurse know:

- if you have any allergies or sensitivities
- if you are unwell. Due to the risk of infection the tattooing procedure will not be carried out if you have had a cold, chest infection or flu in the two weeks prior to your tattoo
- if you take any medication such as blood thinning medication, acne medication or long term steroids.

2. Although most women experience little sensation in this area after breast reconstruction, there may be mild to moderate discomfort associated with the tattooing procedure. Please purchase some local anaesthetic cream to use on day of treatment. We recommend either EMLA or LMX local anaesthetic cream, available from your local chemist. **Before leaving home for your appointment, please apply a generous amount of cream to the area and cover with plastic wrap (e.g. Glad Wrap).**

3. Please purchase a box of breast nursing pads to be used in your daily after care routine for the first two weeks after your treatment. Nursing pads are available from supermarkets and chemists.

After the procedure

Post treatment the breast care nurse will apply a layer of antiseptic ointment to the tattooed area and then cover it with gauze or a nursing pad. Once you are home, the following after care instructions will help you care for your new tattoo.

After care instructions

- Always wash and dry hands before and after touching treated area. This will reduce the risk of introducing an infection.
- Apply a layer of antiseptic ointment, such as Bepanthen (available from your local chemist) to the tattoo three times a day. Ensuring hands are clean and a clean piece of gauze or nursing pad is applied each time. You should do this for the first two weeks until the area appears healed. If you find the skin is still tight after this period, continue applying ointment as required.
- Avoid getting the area wet for 48 hours. After this time the area can be gently cleaned and pat dried. Avoid direct shower pressure as this could irritate the area.
- Avoid any unnecessary touching and do not scratch or pick the area.
- The area may slowly dry and crust, this potential crust needs to be allowed to come off in its own time to allow for adequate pigment uptake.
- Avoid swimming, sun beds and sun bathing until the newly treated area is completely healed. Direct sunlight and chlorine can cause skin irritation.
- Try and wear loose clothing to avoid rubbing and irritating the area.

- Pigment colour will initially appear quite intense immediately post treatment, once the wound has healed and the crust has lifted there will be around a 40 per cent loss of colour intensity.
- Infection is very rare. If the tattooed area continues to stay red and swollen, is hot to the touch, causes excessive pain or you have flu-like symptoms, please contact us as soon as possible. As sensation in this area is often quite minimal it is important to look at site when changing dressing and not rely on sensation.

Things to consider

- Micro-pigmentation is an art process and not an exact science; therefore results will vary from patient to patient.
- Because 40 per cent of the pigment colour is lost within the first two weeks of healing, the initial pigment colour used may be darker than the desired colour.
- Colour and size match cannot always be achieved.
- As with any surgical procedure complications can result including swelling, bruising, reaction to pigment and infection.
- If you have an MRI scan, the tattooed area may show up on the scan. Some patients have reported feeling a tingling sensation when having an MRI. Please tell your radiologist that you have had the tattoo.
- Laser treatments on the treated area can alter the colour and should be avoided.

Frequently asked questions

How will I know if I have an infection?

Infection is very rare. Colours will initially appear very intense immediately after your treatment. If the tattooed area continues to stay red and swollen, is hot to the touch, causes excessive pain or you have flu-like symptoms, please contact us as soon as possible. It is very important that you are looking at the treated area when applying post procedure care; due to minimal sensation you may not feel any signs of infection.

How often will I have to have it done?

After your initial treatment you will be booked in for a second session 6 to 10 weeks later. Sometimes the pigment may not take properly, a second treatment will ensure good colour uptake. As this is a semi-permanent colour you may consider further treatment in the future.

Can I swim?

You should avoid swimming, sun beds and sun bathing until the newly treated area is completely healed. Direct sunlight and chlorine can cause skin irritation and infection and may also affect the pigment.

What are pigments made from?

The pigments used for micro-pigmentation are different to the inks used for permanent tattoos. Our pigments are pharmaceutical grade and made from iron oxides.

For more information and advice

If you have any questions regarding this service please contact:

Breast Care Nurse

The Royal Women's Hospital
(03) 8345 3565 (Monday-Friday during business hours)

For post treatment advice:

Breast Care Nurse

The Royal Women's Hospital
(03) 8345 2000 (switchboard, ask for pager 53100)
(03) 8345 3565 (Mon-Friday during business hours, leave a message if phone unattended)

The Royal Melbourne Hospital
(03) 9342 7000 and ask to have the
BOE Registrar paged (at any time)