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**What is nipple and areola micro-pigmentation?**

Please read this information leaflet carefully. You may contact us in advance if you have any questions or concerns.

Micro-pigmentation (medical tattooing) is a technique used to create a semi-permanent image of an areola and/or nipple for patients who have undergone breast surgery and lost colour or structure to this area.

Pigment (colour) is implanted into the top layer of the skin to re-create the colour and shape of the nipple-areola complex. The aim of the procedure is to improve the aesthetic appearance of the breast by recreating a nipple and/or areola that matches as closely as possible the opposite side (if applicable) within the limitations of using a synthetic pigment. Unfortunately we are unable to guarantee 100% match.

Your procedure will be carried out by a trained micro-pigmentation practitioner with over 6 years of experience and who is an NMC registered clinical nurse specialist in breast reconstruction.

The pigment is applied using a pen-like device loaded with a sterile cartridge (containing a cluster of tiny needles). The needles move up and down at a rapid rate to penetrate the outer and inner layers of skin in order to implant the pigment. Pigments are comprised of iron oxide, titanium oxide, alcohol, water and glycerin. Needles have an 8%-10% nickel content.

## **Are there any complications or risks?**

Micro-pigmentation will not match 100% any existing nipple or areola complex. 100% satisfaction cannot be guaranteed. The extent of the success of the treatment depends on what expectations are desired, the skin type of the patient and the uptake of the pigment in the skin. As semi-permanent pigment is used (which has been tested as safe for use in women who have had breast cancer), the pigment is likely to fade over time so you may wish to consider top-up treatments. Although great care is taken to select the most accurate pigment shade with you, we are unable to match exactly and your lifestyle may have adverse effects on the pigment colour.

Some of the other risks or complications are listed below:

* Allergy to pigments/and or topical anaesthetic ointment/cream
* Infection
* Fading of the colour over time
* Colour spreading from the original implanted position
* Uneven pigment colour over the treated area
* Not achieving an exact match to a natural nipple/areola
* Discomfort during the treatment
* Scarring
* Bleeding
* Flattening of a reconstructed nipple
* Swimming in chlorinated water may cause fading/bleaching of the pigment

All potential complications or risks will be fully discussed with you by the micro-pigmentation practitioner. Please ask if you need clarification.

## **Are there are factors that may affect the result?**

* Natural skin overtones
* Skin characteristics (dryness, oiliness, sun damage, acidity)
* Medication
* Lifestyle (alcohol, smoking, swimming, jacuzzi, sun exposure, sun bed)
* Individual healing ability (excessive bleeding)
* Presence of any scars

#### **Before the procedure**

Most women do not have sensation (feeling) in the area to be treated. The majority of patients have a lack of sensate (feeling) or are completely numb in the area. However, if you do have sensation - please contact us in advance, so we can send you a topical anaesthetic ointment/cream. This is to be applied to the skin 45 to 60 minutes before the procedure to numb the area.

#### **Upon Arrival**

Please check in at the reception desk so we know you have arrived for your appointment.

You will be called into a clinic room where the procedure will take place by the micro-pigmentation practitioner who will perform the procedure following a health questionnaire and complete the consent process.

#### **During the procedure**

The procedure will be fully explained to you by the micro-pigmentation practitioner. You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions and asked to sign a consent form. We will go through your medical history, including any medications you take and any allergies you have. This helps us to determine whether there is anything that would prohibit us from performing the procedure for you. If you have any allergies, in particular to hair dyes, make up or metals you will be offered a skin patch-test. The patch-test involves applying a small amount of pigment to an inconspicuous area. You will be asked to contact the micro-pigmentation practitioners 24-48 hours later with the result. You may wish to proceed with the procedure despite having allergies and knowing the risks. In this case, you will be asked to sign a 'patch-test waiver'. Please note that it is very unusual to have any sort of adverse reaction to the pigments.

Patient participation in choosing the colour and size for the nipple and areola complex is very important. As part of your consultation you will be asked to stand in front of a mirror with the micro-pigmentation practitioner and with your involvement, we will determine the shape to be tattooed and the colours to be used. If you are having both breasts tattooed (bilateral), the practitioner will help you choose the pigment that closely matches your pre-operative photographs (if available), or one that best suits your skin-tone. Once you are happy with the size and shape, and the colours selected the micro-pigmentation practitioner will use the special machine to implant the pigment into your skin over several layers.

The colour chosen will appear darker and brighter immediately after implantation and you should expect to see a fade of up to 40% in the following week. The colours used will be documented in your case notes for future reference to help with colour selection for subsequent procedures.

The initial appointment will last between 60 – 90minutes, with the procedure itself taking around 20-30 minutes (per breast). Each additional appointment will be between 30 – 60 minutes depending on whether you are having treatment to one or both breasts.

At the end of the procedure petroleum jelly (e.g. Vaseline) will be applied over the treated area, and a small dressing will be applied to cover the area. You will be asked to remove this after 24 hours. We will provide you with aftercare instructions that will involve you reapplying the petroleum jelly and a new dressing daily for 5 days.

After your initial appointment if you have consented to having medical photographs taken, the micro-pigmentation practitioner will take non identifiable photos of your breasts for your medical records to monitor this particular aspect of your reconstructive journey.

## **What happens afterwards?**

You will be able to drive yourself home and be able to resume normal activities immediately after the procedure.

Instructions for aftercare of your tattoo(s) will be provided by the micro-pigmentation practitioner. The tattoo will take 7-10 days to heal.

* You may experience some slight swelling or redness to the area and the skin may feel tight for the first 24-48 hours.
* When showering, please keep your back to the water jets/shower head. Shower gels can be used but not on the treated area. Gently pat the area dry with a clean towel or clean kitchen roll/paper or gauze.
* Do not pick off any scabs which form over the treated area, as this can remove the pigment. Let these fall off naturally (usually within 7 – 10 days). The skin may ‘peel’ from the tattooed area.
* We recommend that you do not swim, use a sauna or a jacuzzi, or sunbathe until at least 2 weeks after your procedure. This is to prevent fading or bleaching of the colour. After this time, we recommend you apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly over the tattooed area to create a barrier from the chlorine.

You will be given a follow-up appointment for a second treatment, usually 4-8 weeks after the initial appointment. At this second appointment the micro-pigmentation practitioner will assess the appearance of the nipple and areola complex and apply further pigment/adjust the colour as necessary or as requested.

You may need further top-up procedures in the future, as due to the semi-permanent nature of the pigments the tattoo(s) may fade. To book a future appointment you can self-refer via the McIndoe Centre's helpline or email, you can be referred directly to us by your General Practitioner (GP) or your Consultant can refer you directly to us. If you are using medical insurance it is important you have received a code and your insurance company is prepared to pay for your treatment.

**CT and MRI Scans**

Pigments contain traces of iron oxide. If you have to have a CT/MRI Scan in the future, please inform the scanning department/technician about your tattooed area(s) so they can assess the risks. There have been reports of burns/tingling/heat in the treated area(s).

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Pam Golton & Rebecca Spencer

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