

Nipple Reconstruction

What to expect and how to prepare

This handout explains how nipple reconstruction is done, how to prepare for your procedure, and how to plan for your recovery.

What to Expect

The position of your new nipple will be marked on your breast mound. Skin around this mark will be shaped to form your new nipple. This is usually done as a procedure in clinic. You will be awake for the procedure and have local *anesthetic* (numbing medicine) applied to your breast mound.

About 8 weeks later, the *areola* (darker area around the nipple) will be tattooed in clinic.

How to Prepare

- For 1 week before your procedure, do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your procedure. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). See attached sheet for more information.

If your procedure will be done in clinic:

- We advise you to eat and drink as usual before your procedure. Nipple reconstruction can take up to 2 hours.
- You may drive yourself to this appointment and home afterward.

If your procedure will be done in an operating room:

- Do **not** shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do **not** shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.



Talk with your doctor if you have any questions about your surgery.

- Follow all instructions provided for the other procedures that will be done at the same time as your nipple reconstruction. If you have any questions about how to prepare, call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206. 598.1217.

What to Expect After Your Procedure

Swelling

At first, your reconstructed nipple will be large and swollen. It will settle to about half of this initial size over the next 9 months. Your reconstructed nipple will have limited feeling. It will not react to temperature and touch as natural nipples do.

Incision

You will have an incision on each side of your new nipple. Each incision will be about 1 inch long. The incisions will be closed with stitches. These stitches will dissolve under your skin over the next month.

Dressing

- You may have oozing from your incisions for 48 to 72 hours.
- You may change your dressing after 48 hours. Use tape to attach the outer dressing, as needed.
- Let the Steri-Strips (white tape) over your incisions fall off on their own. This usually takes 1 to 2 weeks if you are showering every day.
- Reapply protective gauze dressing daily as directed for 2 weeks. You will cut a hole in the gauze to surround your nipple. This keeps the nipple from being compressed by your bra.
- Do **not** pick at any crust that forms. Let it fall off on its own.
- Every day for 2 weeks:
 - Clean any remaining crusts with hydrogen peroxide on a cotton swab (Q-tip).
 - Then apply antibiotic ointment to any exposed incisions.
- You may wear a bra to help keep your dressings in place. This will lessen the need for tape.

Activity

- While your first dressing is in place, avoid heavy sweating. Sweat could soil the gauze.
- For 2 weeks, avoid strenuous activity. Do not do any activities that increase your heart rate or breathing rate. You may resume your usual activity level after 2 weeks.

Shower

- You may shower 48 hours after your procedure. Before you shower, remove the protective outer dressing. Reapply it after you shower and dry off.
- Do **not** soak in a bathtub or hot tub or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed.

Pain Medicine

- Over-the-counter pain medicine (medicine you can buy without a prescription), such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), should relieve most of your discomfort.
- If your pain is not relieved with non-prescription pain medicine, call 206.598.1217 so we can prescribe a pain medicine for you.

Nipple Tattooing

Nipple tattooing can be done in the clinic about 8 weeks after your nipple reconstruction. Your healthcare provider will blend tattoo paint to match the color of your natural nipple and areola. It might not be possible to find an exact color match because of the melanin in your skin. If both of your nipples have been reconstructed, your provider will help you choose a color that looks natural with your skin tones.

To learn more, ask your provider for the handout “Nipple Tattooing.”

When to Call

Call your clinic or provider if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any sign of infection in your incision:
 - Redness
 - Increasing pain
 - Swelling
 - Bad-smelling drainage
 - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea or vomiting, or both
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery, 206.598.1217 and press 8.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the resident on call for your surgeon to be paged.