

Nipple Tattooing

Final stage in breast reconstruction

You may have a nipple tattooed on your breast after your breast reconstruction. This handout explains what to expect before and after your procedure.

What is nipple tattooing?

This is a procedure that will result in a permanent tattoo. Ink is applied with needles to create a realistic image of a nipple that appears to have physical dimensions but really is flat to touch. The tattoo will help re-create your nipple and *areola* (the ring of pigmented skin surrounding the nipple).

How will the procedure be done?

The tattooing procedure will be done at the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at UW Montlake and will take about 2 hours. The procedure is done by one of our Advanced Practice Provider (APP) team who specializes in nipple areolar tattooing.

You will talk with the APP about the plan for size, color, and position of the nipple areolar tattoo and the skin will be marked.

Example tattoo photos can be reviewed at the appointment if you request to see some. If you wish, you can bring pre-surgery or example photos to share with the APP for reference.

Lidocaine (medicine to numb part of your body) will be injected into the skin where the tattoo will go. The injections may be uncomfortable but are helpful to make the rest of the procedure pain-free.

Timing

Nipple areolar tattooing can be done 6 months or more after the surgery affecting the area. You will be scheduled for two tattoo sessions (a first and second) about 1 month apart. Two sessions are often needed to achieve adequate color saturation and shading. If you are happy with the appearance after the first session, you can cancel the second one.

What is the difference between surgical nipple tattooing and 3D tattooing?

For nipple areolar reconstruction, you can choose between 2 options:

- You can have a surgical nipple created and then tattooed.
- You can have a 3D tattoo that uses shading to create the appearance of a projected nipple.

A 3D tattoo may be recommended in some cases, such as when there has been prior radiation or there is tight skin over an implant. You can discuss this with your surgeon

After Your Tattoo

The tattooed area will be covered with a dressing after the procedure. We recommend avoiding aerobic exercise the day of the tattoo. If you wish, you will be able to return to normal activities (such as work or school) immediately following the tattoo.

The area is generally not painful afterward. If you have some soreness or stinging at the tattoo site, you can take 500 to 1000 mg of Tylenol every 6 hours as needed.

The day after your procedure, you can remove the initial dressing for showering. After your first shower, use an old towel to dry your body, as there may still be some ink or blood on the skin around the tattoo.

You will be provided with 5 days' worth of dressings to apply afterward. It is important to apply a new dressing every day for 5 days. You can apply moisturizer or ointment on the tattoos 2 times a day for the first month after the procedure.

Avoid any swimming or soaking in water until 2 weeks after tattooing.

While Waiting for Tattooing

If you want to try out nipple areolar reconstruction options prior to permanent tattooing, you can consider 3D nipple areolar temporary tattoos. These are available online and come in a range of colors and sizes. These are okay to try 3 months after your last surgery affecting the area.

Questions?

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

During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8am to 5pm):

If you have any questions or concerns, message your surgeon through MyChart. Please include a photo if needed.

You may also call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, option 2.

Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours:

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or on holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.