

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Having a medical tattoo

Patient Information



What is a medical tattoo?

A medical tattoo procedure is similar to having an ordinary tattoo which we can use to create an image of a nipple and areola, for patients who have had breast surgery. This can be done whether or not you have had a nipple reconstructed. This procedure is carried out by a nurse specialised in tattooing. Please allow two hours for the whole procedure.

The tattoos are applied using colour pigments and needles, which make tiny holes in the surface of your skin, allowing the dye to create a shading effect. The needles are disposable and used only once.

Before you have your tattoo, please let us know if:

- You have any allergies, for example metals such as nickel, or local anaesthetic
- You are unwell or have a cold.

On the day of the tattoo

You will have a consultation with the nurse before you have the tattoo. There is plenty of time for you to discuss the procedure and any concerns you may have. You will be asked to sign a consent form. Anaesthetic cream will be applied to minimise pain and the size and colour of the tattoo will be chosen.

What happens afterwards?

- You should be able to resume normal activities following the procedure
- You can take painkillers if required
- You can shower with the dressing in place. This should stay in place for at least 24 hours
- Once the dressing is removed, apply Bepanthen cream three times a day for 2–3 weeks until healed
- Crusting may appear on the tattoo – do not pick at it as this can remove the colour

- You may have some swelling around the tattoo for a day or two
- The tattoo should not be exposed to direct sunlight without factor 50 suncream, to avoid sunburn and changes in the pigment
- We recommend that you do not swim, use a sauna or jacuzzi and avoid excessive perspiration for two weeks following the procedure, to prevent any pigment changes and to allow the area to heal
- You will be invited for a top-up tattoo around 8 weeks after your first tattoo as fading is expected. This will enable colour longevity and a good colour match.

Looking after your tattoo

- 24 hours after your tattoo, remove the dressing whilst in the shower
- Rinse with water only and pat dry with a clean cloth
- Apply a thin layer of Bepanthen cream 2–3 times a day until healed
- Avoid direct contact with any creams and gels until healed.

Contact details

If you need further information, have concerns or you would like to book an appointment, you can contact the following numbers:

Chelsea 020 7352 8171 ext 1573

Sutton 020 8915 6670 (direct) or 020 8642 6011 ext 4345

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this leaflet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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