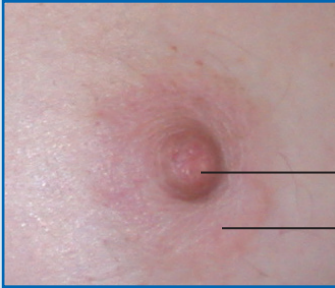


# Nipple and Areola Reconstruction after Breast Reconstruction

An Information Guide

# What is Nipple and Areola Reconstruction?

Nipple and areola reconstruction are procedures done after breast reconstruction to create a nipple-areolar complex that looks as close to a natural breast as possible. This booklet covers reconstruction of the nipple and areola as separate procedures.



## Nipple-areolar complex

The nipple-areolar complex consists of the nipple and areola (labelled below).

## Nipple Reconstruction

### How is nipple reconstruction done at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre?

Nipple reconstruction is done 3 or more months after the final surgery has been completed to create the breast mound. There must be enough time for swelling after surgery to go down, or for an implant to settle so that the new nipple can be put in the right place.

The reconstructed nipple will be placed to either match (as closely as possible) the position of the nipple of the other breast (if one breast was reconstructed), or placed on both reconstructed breasts in a natural-looking position.

Nipple reconstruction is usually done under local anesthesia (freezing) in a clinic procedure room while you are awake using one of the following:

- 1. Skin Flap:** The nipple may be created from the skin of the reconstructed breast using small flaps of skin directly from the tissue on the breast. These flaps of skin will be arranged and stitched together to create a nipple shape.
- 2. Nipple-Share Graft** (only if one breast was reconstructed): Part of the remaining natural nipple is removed and grafted onto the reconstructed breast.
- 3. Labia or Earlobe Graft:** Skin from other parts of your body can be used to create a nipple.

### **What can I expect the new nipple and areola to be like?**

- A reconstructed nipple and areola will not have normal feeling and it will not react to temperature changes the way a natural nipple does.
- If one nipple is being reconstructed the new nipple will be made to look as similar as possible to the remaining nipple, but it will never be the same as the natural nipple.
- The nipple(s) will look large at first. Over time they will shrink and they may shrink further after tattooing.
- There may be differences in the final size and shape of two reconstructed nipples because of differences in skin thickness or tightness or the way they heal.
- The nipple may be flatter than a natural nipple.
- The areola colour is limited by the shades of tattoo pigments available and how well they are taken up by your skin.
- Colour may be uneven, not as dark or as light as you prefer, and may not cover scars.
- If only one nipple and areola is being reconstructed, colour match to other side will not be exact.
- It will not have a 3-D effect.
- The tattoo will fade over time and you may need a touch up later on.
- Nipple reconstructions may flatten after each tattoo session.

- If you have further fading or poor uptake, you should seek an out-of-OHIP paramedical tattoo artist.
- See pages 10-11 for photos of nipple and areola reconstructions covered by OHIP.

## **What if I choose not to have nipple and areola reconstruction OR I am advised against it?**

Nipple and areola reconstruction are optional procedures. Some patients decide not to have nipple reconstruction. The choice is up to you. Nipple and areola reconstruction done at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre are covered by OHIP. You may not be able to have nipple reconstruction if:

- You have had radiation to your reconstruction,
- You have very thin or tight skin,
- You have had problems with healing of your breast reconstruction.

## **How can I get ready for nipple reconstruction?**

- Before your appointment, consider where you think your nipple will look right on your reconstructed breast. You may mark this area before you come to your appointment with a round band-aid.
- Stop taking Aspirin or NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) 7 days before surgery.
- You may drive yourself to the procedure\*
- You may have breakfast or lunch\*

\* If your nipple reconstruction is being done at the same time as another surgery that you will be put to sleep for:

- you must have someone drive you to the procedure.
- do not eat or drink anything after midnight of the night before.

## **What happens during nipple reconstruction?**

- Reconstruction takes up to 45 minutes for one nipple and up to 90 minutes for two nipples.

- Your surgeon will mark the location for the nipple(s) with a marking pen while you are standing up.
- Local anesthesia (medicine to freeze the area) will be injected. The reconstructed breast is usually numb so you will feel very little discomfort.
- The skin flap or graft will be held in place by sutures. These often dissolve but may need to be removed 2 weeks after the procedure.
- Steri strips will be placed on the skin around the new nipple. The steri strips will stay in place for 2 weeks.
- Antibiotic ointment or Vaseline and a dressing that does not cause pressure will be taped over the new nipple(s).
- You will go home after the procedure.
- If you have had implant-based breast reconstruction, you may be given a 5-day course of antibiotics to prevent implant infection.
- Pain medication is not prescribed. Take over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol) at home if you feel discomfort.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

### **If you have skin flap nipple reconstruction:**

- You will be seen by your plastic surgeon 1-2 weeks after the procedure.
- Keep your dressing dry and in place for 48 hours before removing it at home.
- Apply antibiotic ointment or Vaseline to the reconstructed nipple.
- Leave the steri strips in place until your appointment.
- You may shower after the dressing is removed.
- If you have a graft taken from the other nipple or another part of your body:
- You will be seen by your plastic surgeon 5-7 days and 2 weeks after the procedure.

- Keep the dressing dry and in place for 5-7 days until you see your plastic surgeon. The dressing will be replaced at your appointment.
- Keep the new dressing dry and in place for another 5-7 days until you see your plastic surgeon again. The dressing will be removed at your appointment and antibiotic ointment or Vaseline will be applied to the reconstructed nipple.
- You may re-apply ointment or Vaseline at home.
- You may shower after the dressing is removed.

### **What must I avoid after nipple reconstruction?**

- Do not wear a bra or clothing that presses firmly over the nipple for 2-3 weeks.
- You may return to exercise after 2 weeks.
- Do not swim or soak in a tub until all wound edges are healed.

## **Areola Reconstruction**

### **How is areola reconstruction done at Sunnybrook?**

- Areola reconstruction is done three or more months after nipple reconstruction, or longer if the scars need more time to heal.
- Areola reconstruction usually takes the form of a tattoo, but in some cases it can be reconstructed using a skin graft from the groin area at the same time as a skin flap nipple reconstruction. This type of graft is used if the skin around the nipple is tight, or if a yellow-beige colour for the areola is desired. Please consult your plastic surgeon for more information about the groin skin grafts.

## **How can I get ready for nipple/areola tattooing?**

- You must STOP consuming alcohol, caffeine and NSAIDs (drugs containing Aspirin or Ibuprofen) TWO DAYS prior to your procedure date. These substances can cause increased bleeding and/or bruising.
- However, if you take blood thinners or daily Aspirin for medical conditions you must consult your prescribing physician before stopping them.

## **What happens during areola reconstruction with a tattoo?**

- Your surgeon will mark the location for the tattoo(s) with a marking pen while you are standing up.
- The tattooing will take about 45 minutes. Most women feel very little to no pain on the reconstructed breast, but local anesthetic (a drug given to stop pain) may be used if needed.
- A semi-permanent pigment is injected using a sterile single-use tattoo needle into the reconstructed nipple-areolar complex. This will break the skin and cause a small amount of bleeding.
- After the tattoo is done, a non-stick bandage is tented over the tattooed area and taped in place.
- Over-the-counter acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be taken at home if you have pain or discomfort. You will not be prescribed pain medication.
- If you have a history of implant-based reconstruction, you will be prescribed an antibiotic to prevent infection.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

- You may have a small amount of swelling, redness and bruising.
- The tattoo will also look much darker for one week following the procedure.

- As the tattoo heals, a thin scab will form over the area. Do not rub, scratch or pick any crust that is on the tattooed area. If you remove the pigment crusts/scabs too early it will result in loss of colour and/or cause scarring.

### **2-3 hours after the procedure:**

- Gently splash the area with cold water and pat dry with a clean towel. Repeat every few hours to keep the area moist and to prevent a larger/thicker scab from forming.

### **For TWO DAYS after the procedure:**

- Do not drink caffeine or alcohol and do not take any anti-inflammatory medication.
- Do not smoke.
- AFTER TWO DAYS you can start having quick lukewarm showers but keep the spray away from the tattoo site. You can gently cleanse the site and then pat it dry with a clean towel. Once the scabs fall off you can shower and cleanse normally.

### **For ONE WEEK after the procedure:**

- At bedtime and in the morning, apply a very thin layer of your regular moisturizer to the area. A white or yellow cream-based moisturizer is best. Avoid oil-based or greasy petroleum-based products.
- Do not swim or soak the area.
- Try to avoid wearing a bra or restrictive clothing over the tattooed area to avoid rubbing or scraping.
- Do not expose your tattoo to direct sunlight or tanning booths without UV protection. UV rays cause the pigments to fade faster or change colour.
- One procedure cannot guarantee the desired outcome and you may require touch ups. If you have repeated fading or poor pigment uptake, you should seek an out-of-OHIP paramedical tattoo artist. Please ask your surgical team for recommendations.



## Are there other options for nipple and areola reconstruction?

**Note:** The following options are not done at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and are not covered by OHIP. A member of the healthcare team can provide you with resources if you are interested in these options.

1. **3-D tattooing** of the entire nipple-areolar complex can be done by a paramedical tattoo artist to give the illusion of a realistic nipple and shading to the areola.
2. **Custom-made** stick-on prosthetic nipple-areolar complexes can be made.

## When should I call my plastic surgeon?

If you have concerns, call your plastic surgeon's office to make an appointment.

Call your surgeon right away if you have any of the following signs of infection or complications:

- Worse or severe pain
- Swelling, redness or pus-like discharge
- Temperature of 38°C or higher for over 24 hours

Go to your closest Emergency Department if you experience shortness of breath, chest pain, or trouble breathing.

## Who do I call for support?

If you need additional emotional support, call your plastic surgeon's office and ask for a referral for support services. Your surgeon will refer you to a psychologist or social worker in the Odette Cancer Centre.

# Examples of Nipple and Areola Reconstructions Covered by OHIP



Local flap nipple reconstruction  
(No tattoo)



Local flap nipple reconstruction  
with healed tattoo



Local flap nipple reconstruction  
immediately after tattooing



Nipple share graft with healed tattoo



Local flap nipple reconstruction with healed tattoo



Local flap nipple reconstruction with healed tattoo



3D tattoo (permission to print given by Kyla from Cosmetic Transformations)



3D tattoo (permission to print given by Kyla from Cosmetic Transformations)

## Who do I contact with questions?

Louise Temerty Breast Centre Nursing Line: 416-480-5000

Plastic Surgeon's Office: 416-480-6069

## Who do I call after hours or on the weekend?

If you have questions or concerns after clinic hours, there is always a plastic surgery resident on call. Call Sunnybrook Locating at 416-480-4244 and ask for the plastic surgery resident on call. If you cannot reach the resident, go to your nearest emergency department.

### Bayview Campus

2075 Bayview Avenue, M1 500

Toronto, ON M4N 3M5

[sunnybrook.ca](http://sunnybrook.ca)



© 2020 Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

PR 47398 (2021/03/09)

*Fully affiliated with the University of Toronto*

