

Plastic Surgery – Nipple and Areola Reconstruction

Introduction

Following your breast reconstruction your next step may be to consider having a nipple and areola reconstruction. Nipple and areola reconstruction can be surgical or non-surgical.

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine elective services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always possible to identify when treatment will take place. This document provides you with information on how you can support yourself while waiting to attend the hospital.

Guidance for Patients

Non-Surgical Options

If you do not wish to have further surgery the breast reconstruction team can offer you two non-surgical methods to recreate a nipple and areola.

1. Moulded Silicone Prosthesis

This is a stick-on nipple and areola prostheses custom made to match your size, colour and shape which is similar to your remaining nipple if present or as desired. The prosthetic nipple is made by our skilled medical technicians out of silicone here at Southmead Hospital. If you choose this option, please talk to one of the breast reconstruction nurses who will refer you to our prosthetic team for an appointment.

2. Tattooing of the Nipple/Areola Complex

The tattooing process uses shading techniques using different coloured pigments to create a three-dimensional effect of a nipple. However, these tattoos can fade with time and may require re-tattooing. It is important to note that the tattoo is flat and therefore there will be no nipple projection through clothing. If you choose this option, please talk to one of the breast reconstruction nurses who can book you an appointment with them to carry out the tattooing for you.

Surgical Option

A nipple and areola can be made from your own body tissue. This procedure can be done about six to twelve months after your breast reconstruction surgery when everything has settled down. Your plastic surgeon will discuss your options with you.

1. Nipple flap

A nipple flap reconstruction creates the nipple only with tattooing of an areola at a later stage. This surgical option entails cutting a small flap of skin which is lifted from you reconstructed breast to form the nipple. The skin is then sutured in place and a dressing applied. This process can be undertaken as a day case under a local or general anaesthetic.

2. Nipple flap with A Skin Graft to Form the Areola

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The nipple mound is created as described above see Diagram 4. To create the areola a full thickness skin graft is taken for the outer edge of the abdominal scar from your reconstruction surgery. This is called a Dog ear.

It is important that while you are waiting for your surgery you remain as active and as medically fit as possible. If you have any long-standing conditions such as high blood pressure you should get this reviewed at your GP surgery to make sure it remains well controlled. This will also help prevent any unnecessary delays when you come for your pre-operative assessment. Maintaining a well-balanced diet is also important, as is reducing any excessive weight that may be impacting on your general health. If you are a current smoker it would be advisable to seek support to help with stopping, advice can be found at your local pharmacy or Doctor's surgery.

Find out your BMI

Follow this link to the [NHS BMI Calculator](#)

BMI of 25+

If you have a Body Mass Index of 25 or higher the [Better Health Let's Do This – Lose Weight](#) website provides online support to help you lose weight and includes access to the NHS 12 week weight loss plan.

The NHS 12 week fitness plan will support your weight loss plan as well as improve your health. This is aimed at beginners and will help get you into the habit of regular exercise over the course of the programme. It is structured but flexible enough to allow you to fit the exercise sessions around your other weekly commitments.

Information and advice on healthy eating and becoming more active is available from:

- [One You Eat Better \(website\)](#) - includes Easy Meals app for healthy meals and the Change4Life Food Scanner to help reduce levels of sugar in your diet
- [Better Health - Get Active \(website\)](#) - includes tips on getting active for all, including the downloadable Active 10 app, as well as tailored advice for those living with a long-term condition.

What should I do if my health is deteriorating?

Urgent Health Advice

For urgent health advice about physical or mental health, when it's not an emergency, please call 111 from any landline or mobile phone. You can also visit www.nhs.uk. The NHS 111 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Life Threatening Emergencies

For something life threatening –severe bleeding, breathing difficulties or chest pains –please dial 999.

GP surgeries are still open

GP practice staff are also helping patients to manage their conditions at home while they wait for hospital appointments. GP surgeries are still open and are working differently to how they did before the COVID-19 pandemic and GP practices continue to make best use of telephone, online and video consultations. Face-to-face appointments are still being given to those who need it. When you phone or use an online form to contact your GP surgery to make an appointment, you will be asked some questions which are designed to

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help staff guide you to the most appropriate clinical person to help you with your condition. This could be a nurse, clinical pharmacist, physician's associate, GP or paramedic.

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