



PATIENT LEAFLET – NIPPLE RECONSTRUCTION

After breast reconstruction, you can decide if you'd like to have your nipple reconstructed, too. Some women do and some don't – the choice is up to you. You have time to make that decision. Nipple reconstruction is done after the reconstructed breast has had time to heal – at least 3 or 4 months after reconstruction surgery. But you can take longer to decide if you'd like. The nipple may be reconstructed from the surrounding skin at the site desired for nipple placement. Miss Bright-Thomas makes small incisions and then elevates the tissue into position, forming and shaping it into a living tissue projection that mimics the natural nipple. Older techniques, which used donor tissue from the genital region or elsewhere, have become less favoured over time.

BEFORE NIPPLE RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY

Nipple reconstruction surgery is usually done as outpatient surgery, which means that you don't stay overnight in the hospital. Miss Bright-Thomas will draw markings on your breast to show where the incisions will be made. Usually this is done with a felt-tip marker. You'll probably be standing up while this happens.

Nipple reconstruction is generally done under local anaesthetic. This means that Miss Bright-Thomas will use a needle to inject numbing medication into the area where the reconstructed nipple will be. If you have local anaesthetic, you will be awake during the procedure. Skin to create the new nipple is usually taken right from the site where the new nipple will be located. This has become the favoured approach. Another potential source is the opposite nipple, if this is large enough to share. Make sure you're clear about how the reconstruction is being done and why, especially if a graft from the opposite nipple is recommended.

DURING NIPPLE RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY

Typically, a small incision is made at the site where the nipple will be made. The skin is formed into a nipple shape and small sutures (stitches) are used to secure the form. The new nipple and surrounding areola can be tattooed about 3 months after surgery.

Once the nipple is sewn into place, a nipple shield (a protective covering shaped like a tiny hat with a wide flat brim) is filled with antibacterial ointment and taped over the reconstructed nipple to protect it.

The length of nipple reconstruction surgery can range from 30 minutes to an hour or so. Tattooing, which happens about 3 months after the nipple reconstruction surgery, usually takes 30 to 40 minutes and is done under local anaesthetic in the outpatient clinic by our breast care nurse specialist.

AFTER NIPPLE RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY

If you've had local anaesthesia, you'll be able to go home after the nipple shield is in place. If you've had general anaesthesia, you'll be moved to a recovery room after surgery, where hospital staff members will monitor you. Once you're awake and Miss Bright-Thomas has checked your heart rate, body temperature, and blood pressure, you'll be allowed to go home. No matter which type of anaesthesia you have, make sure you arrange for someone else to drive you home.

Miss Bright-Thomas will give you specific instructions to follow for your recovery. The nipple shield is usually left on for about 3 days. After it's removed you can shower. Your reconstructed nipple will probably look pointed and somewhat larger than your other nipple. After the stitches are removed – usually after 2 weeks – the nipple will begin to flatten out and look more like your other nipple. The reconstructed nipple can be tender for a week or so. Ask Miss Bright-Thomas for medicines you can take to ease any pain you may have.