Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Nipple Reconstruction

This information will help you get ready for your nipple reconstruction.

What is nipple reconstruction?

Nipple reconstruction is a procedure that rebuilds your nipple after you have had breast surgery. In this procedure, your nipple will be reconstructed (made) using skin from your chest.

Your doctor will tell you if nipple reconstruction is right for you.

Nipple reconstruction can be done in your doctor's office or in an operating room. Your doctor will tell you where your procedure will be done.

About 3 to 4 months after your nipple reconstruction, you can get permanent nipple and areola (ayr-EE-oh-luh) tattoos. A physician assistant with special training and a tattoo license will do this procedure. They will tattoo your reconstructed nipple with color. They will also tattoo an areola (the circle of darker skin around your nipple).

To learn more, read *About Your Nipple and Areola Tattoo Procedure: What You Should Know* (www.mskcc.org/pe/nipple_areola_tattoo).

What to do before your nipple reconstruction

If your procedure will be done in an operating room:

- Follow the instructions in *Getting Ready for Surgery* (www.mskcc.org/pe/getting-ready-surgery). This is a resource your nurse will give you. It has important information on how to get ready for your nipple reconstruction.
- Arrange for someone to take you home. You will need someone to go home with you after your procedure.

If your procedure will be done in your doctor's office:

- You may be given a prescription for antibiotics to take before your procedure. If you get this prescription, fill it at your local pharmacy.

What to do the day of your nipple reconstruction

Things to remember

- Bring loose and comfortable clothing to wear home after your procedure. You do not want to have any

pressure or friction (rubbing) on your incisions (surgical cuts).

- If you received a sticker to help your surgeon place your nipple, wear it the day of your procedure.

If your procedure will be done in an operating room: Follow the instructions in *Getting Ready for Surgery* (www.mskcc.org/pe/getting-ready-surgery) and the instructions for eating and drinking below.

Instructions for eating

Important: If you take a GLP-1 medicine, do not follow these instructions. Follow the instructions in *Eating and Drinking Before Your Surgery or Procedure When Taking GLP-1 Medicines* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1) instead.



Stop eating at midnight (12 a.m.) the night before your surgery or procedure. This includes hard candy and gum.

Your healthcare provider may have given you different instructions for when to stop eating. If so, follow their instructions. Some people need to fast (not eat) for longer before their surgery or procedure.

Instructions for drinking

Important: If you take a GLP-1 medicine, do not follow these instructions. Follow the instructions in *Eating and Drinking Before Your Surgery or Procedure When Taking GLP-1 Medicines* (www.mskcc.org/pe/eat-drink-glp1) instead.

Between midnight (12 a.m.) and 2 hours before your arrival time, only drink the liquids on the list below. Do not eat or drink anything else. Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time.

- Water.
- Clear apple juice, clear grape juice, or clear cranberry juice.
- Gatorade or Powerade.
- Black coffee or plain tea. It's OK to add sugar. Do not add anything else.
  - Do not add any amount of any type of milk or creamer. This includes plant-based milks and creamers.
  - Do not add flavored syrup.

If you have diabetes, pay attention to the amount of sugar

in your drinks. It's easier to control your blood sugar levels if you include sugar-free, low-sugar, or no added sugar versions of these drinks.

It's helpful to stay hydrated before surgeries and procedures, so drink if you're thirsty. Do not drink more than you need. You'll get intravenous (IV) fluids during your surgery or procedure.



Stop drinking 2 hours before your arrival time. This includes water.

Your healthcare provider may have given you different instructions for when to stop drinking. If so, follow their instructions.

If your procedure will be done in your doctor's office:

- You can eat a regular breakfast the morning of your procedure.
- You can shower as you normally do, but do not put any lotion, cream, or powder on your chest.
- If you were given a prescription for antibiotics, take them as instructed once you enter the procedure room. If you have any questions about this, call your surgeon's office.

What to do after your nipple reconstruction

If your procedure was done in an operating room:

- You will go home the same day as your procedure. You will need someone to go home with you.
- Before you go home, put on your loose and comfortable clothing that you brought with you.

If your procedure was done in your doctor's office:

- You will go home the same day as your procedure. You can go home on your own.
- Before you go home, put on your loose and comfortable clothing that you brought with you.

What to do when you're back home

Clothing

- While you're recovering:
  - Do not wear any tight clothing or bras that can rub against your incisions.
  - If you wear bras, choose soft, supportive bras without an underwire. Make sure to loosen the straps so there's no pressure on your nipple. Wear them for 2 weeks after your procedure.
  - Do not apply any pressure or friction to your nipple

for 2 weeks after your procedure.

Showering

- You can shower 48 hours (2 days) after your procedure.
- If you have any bandages, take them off when you shower. After your shower, put gauze on your incisions.
- Gently wash your nipple with soap and water. Do not use a washcloth, loofah, or a scrubbing cloth or brush.
- You may have scabbing on your nipple. Your nipple must not be submerged (kept under water). Do not take a bath until the scabbing has fully healed.

Physical activity

- Your healthcare provider will give you instructions on exercises and movements you can do while your incisions are healing. Make sure to follow those instructions.
- You may have scabbing on your nipple. Your nipple must not be submerged (kept under water). Do not swim or use a hot tub until the scabbing has fully healed.
- Check with your healthcare provider before starting heavy exercises, such as:
  - Running.
  - Jogging.

- Lifting weights.

Follow-up appointment

Your first follow-up appointment will be _____ days after your procedure. If you have sutures (stitches) that need to be taken out, they will be taken out during this appointment.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of these side effects after your nipple reconstruction:

- A fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher.
- Redness, warmth, or pain in your nipple area that's getting worse.
- Flu-like symptoms (such as fever, headache, body aches, and chills).
- Shortness of breath.
- Drainage coming from your incisions.
- Any type of skin infection on any part of your body.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Nipple Reconstruction - Last updated on April 1, 2026

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center