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Nipple Reconstruction

What to expect and how to prepare

This handout explains how nipple reconstruction is done, how to prepare for your procedure, and how to plan for your recovery.

What to Expect

The position of your new nipple will be marked on your breast mound. Skin around this mark will be shaped to form your new nipple.

How to Prepare

For 1 week before your procedure, do **not** take any vitamins, supplements, or NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, or aspirin).

If your procedure will be done in clinic:

- We advise you to eat and drink as usual before your procedure.
- You may drive yourself to this appointment and home afterward.
- You will be awake and have local anesthetic (numbing medicine) applied.
- Nipple reconstruction can take up to 2 hours.

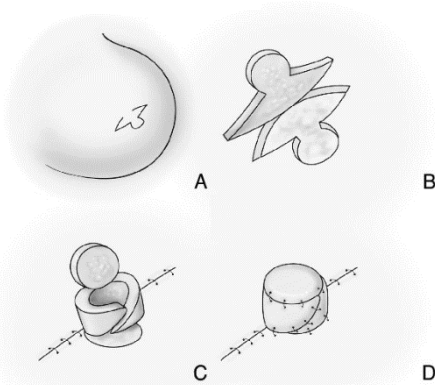
If your procedure will be done in an operating room:

- Follow all instructions provided for the other procedures that will be done at the same time as your nipple reconstruction.

What to Expect After Your Procedure

Swelling

At first, your reconstructed nipple will be large and swollen. It will settle and decrease to potentially half in size over time. Your reconstructed nipple will have limited feeling. It will not react to temperature and touch as natural nipples do.



(A) Your surgeon will make an incision to begin your nipple reconstruction.

(B) Skin and a small amount of fatty tissue will be lifted.

(C) The two ends of the skin are sutured together to provide the base shape.

(D) The top portion of the skin is then sutured to the base shape to complete your nipple reconstruction.

Image source: Journal of the Korean Medical Association

Incision Care

You will have an incision on each side of your new nipple. Each incision will be about 1 inch long. The incisions will be closed with stitches. These stitches will be removed at your 2-week follow-up appointment.

- Remove the outermost bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave the bandage in place until it falls off. If it does not fall off on its own, we will remove it during your first follow-up appointment.
- Some drainage from your incision is normal. If you have any drainage from your incisions, you may cover the area with dry gauze or a panty liner. If you do not have drainage, leave the incision uncovered.
- Do **not** pick at any crust that forms. Let it fall off on its own.
- Reapply protective dressing (foam donut) and wear 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 4 weeks. This prevents the nipple from being compressed. Secure with tape or hold in place with a bra that is not too tight or compressive.

Hygiene

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and wash very gently over your incisions.
- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

Activity

- For 2 weeks, avoid strenuous activity. Do not do any activities that increase your heart rate, breathing rate or cause excess sweating. You may resume your usual activity level after 2 weeks.
- Avoid pressure and friction to the nipple.

Nipple Tattooing

- Nipple tattooing can be done in clinic about 6 months after your nipple reconstruction. To learn more, ask your provider for the handout “Nipple Tattooing.”

Pain Medicine

- Over-the-counter pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) and NSAIDs (ibuprofen or naproxen) should relieve most of your discomfort.

When to Call

Call your clinic or provider if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any sign of infection in your incision:
 - Redness
 - Increasing pain
 - Swelling
 - Bad-smelling drainage
 - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea or vomiting, or both
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8am to 5pm):

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if applicable.

Alternatively, you may call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206-598-1217 option 2.

Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206-598-6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.