Post operative care

• You will have a dressing over the operated area. This dressing is shower proof and should be left in place until you attend your post operative clinic appointment.

• There may be slight oozing of blood after the surgery that will stain the dressing. Do not worry about this unless the dressing becomes saturated, you feel severe pain, or there is marked swelling and redness in the area. In this case contact one of the Clinical Nurse Specialists for Plastic Surgery. (Details at end of leaflet)

• You will be allocated an appointment for 10–14 days after your surgery to come to the Burns & Plastics Outpatient’s clinic to have dressings changed and any sutures removed.

• Healing may take up to 2 weeks. The scars will be quite noticeable for around 3 months and then fade slowly.

• Approximately 3 months after surgery you will be allocated an appointment for nipple-areola tattooing to complete the process. (See QEHB leaflet: Information for patients undergoing Areola Micro-Pigmentation Nipple Tattooing)

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact:

Clinical Nurse Specialists, Breast Reconstruction
Mobile: 07771 624 743 or Mobile: 07786 396 945

Information for patients undergoing surgical nipple reconstruction

Do you really need to go to A&E? Check symptoms online quickly and safely. A free service for NHS patients.
ubah.nhs.uk/ask

Burns and Plastics
Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston
Birmingham, B15 2GW
Telephone: 0121 627 2000

Building healthier lives

UHB is a no smoking Trust
Approximately 6–9 months after breast reconstruction surgery, when the shape of the reconstructed breast has settled, a new nipple and areola can be created. This two part process commences with surgical reconstruction of the nipple “button” and is completed three months later when the finishing touches are applied with Nipple Areola Tattooing. (See the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham (QEHB) leaflet: Information for patients undergoing Areola Micro-Pigmentation Nipple Tattooing.) This leaflet discusses the first stage of surgical nipple reconstruction.

Benefits of surgical nipple reconstruction
The aim of this procedure is to improve the cosmetic appearance of the breast by creating as closely as possible a nipple and then an areola that matches the existing nipple (if applicable). This can have a positive effect on improving body image and boosting self esteem.

Although a natural nipple is sensitive to temperature, touch and will change shape, a reconstructed nipple remains a static shape; more often it maintains a slight to moderate projection from the skin. Most women are very pleased with the result.

Risks
As with any surgical procedure there are risks which are listed below:

- There is a small risk of bleeding or infection after the surgery
- The local skin flap used to reconstruct the nipple button may fail resulting in the loss of the nipple button, however this is rare
- It is extremely difficult to achieve exact symmetry and it is usual to notice slight differences in nipple button position
- The new nipple button projection always flattens to some extent
- Sometimes it can flatten significantly and you may need to undergo the nipple reconstruction again. You will need to discuss this with your surgeon

Alternatives to surgery
There are two more methods of nipple reconstruction available other than surgical nipple reconstruction.

1. Moulded Silicone Prosthesis
If you do not want any further surgery, a very realistic nipple-areola complex can be created which matches your natural nipple areola complex. These are custom made and are known as ‘stick on’ prostheses

2. Tattooing of the Nipple-Areola Complex
By varying colour and techniques in the tattooing process, a shading effect can be created which can produce a three dimensional appearance of a nipple. However, these tattoos fade with time and there will be no projection through clothing.

The procedure
If you decide to go ahead with the surgical option for nipple reconstruction, your surgeon will discuss with you, in detail, the risks and benefits of your operation. You will then be asked to read and sign a consent form for the operation.

This day case local anaesthetic surgery is performed under normal operating theatre sterile conditions.

This procedure is undertaken in one of our day surgery theatres. Before you have the local anaesthetic injected, the surgeon will mark the area to be reconstructed in order to achieve position symmetry as close as possible to your natural nipple (if applicable). The procedure take around 20–30 minutes to complete and you can usually expect to go home within 2 hours of surgery.

(Nipple reconstruction can also be carried out under a general anaesthetic if you are also having some secondary procedures performed that require this type of anaesthesia.)