

Scalp Micro-Pigmentation (SMP)

What is Scalp Micro-Pigmentation (SMP)?

Scalp Micro-Pigmentation (SMP) is a non-surgical, medical-grade tattoo procedure that involves the placement of tiny pigment deposits within the upper dermis of the scalp that simulates the appearance of naturally growing hair. For people who are balding or thinning, the goal of the SMP treatment is to create an illusion of thicker, fuller, stronger hair by simulating the look of individual hairs.

What are the main uses for SMP?

1. A Shaved Look

Creating a shaved look using SMP has become increasingly popular with people who want to mimic the appearance of a closely cropped full head of hair. This procedure simulates the uniform appearance of growing stubble similar to when the hair reaches a length of between .1mm (1 guard) and .5mm (0 guard) growth on a shaved scalp.

2. The Appearance of Density

SMP can increase the appearance of density in areas of thinning hair by decreasing the color contrast between the scalp and hair in patients with longer hair lengths.

This thickening effect can be particularly beneficial for:

- Men and women with all over diffuse thinning
- Patients who want to reduce, or eliminate, the use of camouflage products used on a daily basis

3. Scar Concealment

SMP is an effective procedure to help conceal and reduce the visibility of scars. These can be due to trauma to the scalp or from a variety of surgical procedures including FUT, old punch graft donor sites, FUE, craniotomy, and scalp reductions.

4. Augmenting a Hair Transplant

SMP has become very valuable tool to enhance the appearance of hair transplant procedures by giving the appearance of added density. This can be beneficial for patients who have undergone previous surgeries but who still appear “thinner” than they would like.

SMP at Bernstein Medical

- Prior to beginning SMP sessions, you will need to arrange a thorough consultation to best determine the pattern, desired effect, and goals of treatment. If appropriate, the doctor will also evaluate you for conditions such as psoriasis, eczema or active infections that may not allow for SMP to be performed.
- Sessions are generally performed between 2-4 weeks apart to allow time for exfoliation and settling of the ink. The ink dots will gradually appear less sharp over the following weeks. Patients often need 3 sessions to get the desired result.
- You may be given local anesthesia to numb the skin and sedatives to relax you; however, most patients do not require this.
- The machine used to perform SMP is called the Dermatograph. It is attached to tiny needles that cycle at a rate of 100-140 cycles per second.
- SMP needles penetrate and deposit ink at a depth of 0.25 to 0.5 mm into the skin. They are very fine medical-grade needles that deposit a small spot of specially formulated pigment.

Who will benefit from SMP?

- People who most benefit from SMP are those in whom hair transplantation cannot provide adequate coverage.
- SMP can be particularly useful for covering scars and creating fullness in the mid-scalp or along a widening part.
- Patients who dislike the daily routines of using topical concealers or powders to give the appearance of more hair and want a more permanent solution.
- It is important to know that you can have a hair transplant on top of SMP and vice versa! In this case, the SMP acts like filler and the hair adds texture.

Pre-Operative Instructions

- Wash your hair and scalp the day before and the morning of your procedure.
- Do not use minoxidil, powders, concealers or hair products (gels, hair spray) the day of your procedure. You may not use minoxidil or other alcohol-based products on the scalp for 4 weeks after SMP.

- You may switch to a non-alcohol based minoxidil that can be used 2 weeks after the procedure.
- Have a light breakfast. You may bring snacks if you have a longer procedure scheduled.
- Do not drink caffeine or alcohol within 24 hours before procedure. It can cause increased bleeding and also may increase sensitivity to medications given during the procedure.
- Arrange for transportation back home if you will be having light sedation during your procedure; you cannot drive afterwards.

Post-Procedure Instructions

Day One (Day of treatment):

- Clear (lymph) fluid is going to form on the surface of the procedure area. After 2 hours, gently wipe off the fluid with a moistened cotton pad. Do this every hour until bedtime.
- Before bed, cleanse the treated area with baby shampoo and cool to lukewarm water. Be very gentle during this process and rub area with smooth motions for about 10 seconds before rinsing. Ensure all soap has been rinsed away. **DO NOT** use any cleansing products containing acids (glycolic, lactic, or AHA), or exfoliants. Be sure to wash your hands with a disinfectant soap before cleansing or touching the procedure area.
- To dry, gently pat procedure area with a clean tissue. Blow dry your hair on a low, cool setting, avoiding any direct heat on the procedure area. The hair should not stay wet for any longer than necessary (Do NOT air dry).

Days 2-7

- Cleanse the procedure area gently, as explained above, twice daily (morning and night) and follow drying instructions above.

After Day 7

- You may wash/condition your hair as normal. Adhere to guidelines below for hair product usage.

Things to Avoid During Healing Process

- **Avoid intense exercise for 3 days following each SMP session.**
- Avoid sweating, saunas, steam rooms, Jacuzzis and any other hot, damp environments for the first 3 days following each SMP procedure.
- Do not wear tight hats that may cause friction on the procedure area for the first week
- **Do not use powders, concealers, hair products (gels, hair spray) or alcohol-based products on the scalp for two weeks** after SMP.
- **Do not use Rogaine (minoxidil) throughout the duration of your SMP treatment timeline and for 4 weeks after completion.** Give your SMP ink a full month to heal and settle in the scalp. After this period, you can use minoxidil as you normally would.

- **Avoid chlorine** submersion during the healing process. You should not expose your SMP to chlorine until fully healed (typically one month's time), as the chemicals can alter the color of the pigment as it heals within the skin.

What to Expect While Your SMP Heals

- Your scalp may become dry and itchy following the procedure. If this happens, you can apply a **very thin layer** of organic oils (grapeseed, Argan etc.) or Vaseline (petrolatum) to the area, just enough to add moisture to the skin. Do not scratch! Scratching can disrupt the healing and can cause pigment to come off.
- Your **scalp will naturally exfoliate** over the weeks following the SMP procedure. The dots will appear less defined compared to the first day as the dead skin layers are shed.
- **When in strong sunlight, you should wear a hat.** It shouldn't be tight against the procedure area and should only be worn for short periods of time. **After two weeks you may use a sunscreen with a SPF of 30+, but a hat is still advised as an extra precaution.** For best long-term pigment retention, SPF of 30+ should **always** be used on the procedure area once it is healed.
- Additional **sleep and pain medications are generally not required** after SMP.
- **Antibiotics are generally not required.**

FAQ's

Q. What is SMP?

A. SMP stands for Scalp Micro-Pigmentation. SMP is a medical-grade tattoo of the scalp that creates the appearance of more hair in the area you wish to appear fuller. SMP is performed over a series of sessions, spaced between 2-4 weeks apart. Once the skin has healed and the tattoo pigment has settled, we assess the results and where more pigment and density can and should be added. The SMP pigment will gradually fade over time and touch up sessions will eventually be needed.

Q: Does it hurt?

A: Everyone experiences SMP differently. Some patients fall asleep during the procedure while others experience modest discomfort. The sensation is commonly described as a "nagging" feeling that is around a 3 on a pain scale of 1-10. At Bernstein Medical, we offer medications to relax you, as well as the option of local anesthesia to make your SMP procedure as comfortable as possible.

Q: How many sessions will it take to see the final outcome?

A: The final results are usually visible after the third or fourth session. This can vary from person to person

Q: Why can't it be done in one session? Isn't it a tattoo?

A: The skin is the largest organ in the body. Its many surfaces have different textures, thicknesses, and pH levels. The skin is unpredictable in how it heals; therefore, it is necessary to use the first session to create a framework for following sessions. Pigment absorbs more easily

in some skin types than in others, so follow-up sessions help determine where pigment needs to be reinforced and where extra density needs to be added to create an even look.

Q. How long do I need to wait between sessions?

A: Between 2-4 weeks. Since the epidermal layer of the skin regenerates about every 28 days, waiting this period between procedures ensures adequate time for healing and allows for a more accurate assessment of pigment retention at follow-up visits. Typically the first and second sessions will be done two weeks apart, and we will wait four weeks between the second and third.

Q. How long does each session take?

A. The procedure time varies depending on the size of the area of coverage. The procedure can be as short as 30 minutes or take as long as 8 hours.

Q: How long does it last?

A: The results can last anywhere between two to ten years. Skin type, sun exposure, and chemicals impact the retention.

Q. Is it going to turn blue or green over time like some tattoos do?

A: The pigments we use at Bernstein Medical are of the highest quality, are proven to retain well over time and are designed to resist discoloration.

Some inks used for traditional tattoos could be combined with several different colors to achieve the final shade you see. Over time, these pigments break down in the skin and may result in the blue or green hues seen in traditional tattoos. These pigments should not be used in SMP.

Q. Will SMP damage my hair follicles or interfere with future hair growth?

A. The needle and pigment used in SMP do not penetrate deep enough to reach, or damage, the hair follicle. SMP can be used after a hair transplant to add the appearance of density in regions where the hair is still thin.

Q. Why can't I exercise for three days after I get SMP?

A. To have the best outcome, you should avoid sweating during this healing process. Excessive exercise can lead to sweating in the region of fresh ink and may disturb the pigment before it is able to completely settle and seal in place. Sweat can also promote the growth of bacteria in the newly treated area.

Q: Will I be able to stop using topical concealers after SMP?

A: Toppik is a compound of keratin fibers which gets electrostatically charged so that the fibers in the powder anchor to the hair, thus increasing density. SMP provides a similar effect to products like Toppik, Dermatch, etc. in that it reduces contrast between the scalp skin and the hair, but it adds no physical volume on the hair like these products do.

Although SMP may not provide as dark a coverage as Toppik or Dermatch, it eliminates the need for daily application. It also gives the patient the freedom to engage with physical and social activities with greater confidence.

Q. What are some common unrealistic expectations?

A. SMP mimics individual hair follicles to create the appearance of coverage and/or density. The SMP dots mimic and enhance the appearance of hair in regions that are thinning. SMP will not achieve the darkness that a heavily coated head of concealer would achieve as it is designed to look more natural.

Q. What if my hair goes gray/white in the future? Will dark SMP look funny?

A. The pigments used in SMP are designed to naturally soften over the years. Even with white hair, dark SMP dots on your scalp provide an element of dimension within your hair. When all hair exits the scalp, even white hair, it appears to have a darker color underneath the skin surface. This is the reason darker dots are still able to blend within white hair naturally.

Q. Why does my SMP look slightly cloudy and not as sharp as right after I had the procedure done?

A. SMP is performed by inserting pigment through the epidermis and into the upper dermal layer of the skin. The epidermis naturally sheds and regenerates approximately every 27-28 days. Immediately after the procedure, the implanted pigment is seen in both the upper dermis and epidermis, which is why it looks so dark and crisp. Over the course of the 27-28 days, as your skin goes through its natural exfoliation process, the residual pigment that is in the epidermis sheds as well. When the cells regenerate, the layer of epidermis no longer has pigment in it, but sits on top of the upper dermal layer where your permanent pigment resides. This results in a slightly less sharp pigment dot, since there is now a layer of skin on top of the permanent pigment.

Q. Do more men or women get SMP?

A. At Bernstein Medical, our patients are about 50% female and 50% male. Men and women who suffer from hair thinning, who would like more coverage following their surgery, or who are not candidates for surgery can opt to have the procedure. Hair loss does not discriminate and neither does SMP!

Q. When is SMP not a good option?

A. SMP may not be the best option for a patient with a completely bald area surrounded by hair longer than 1/4 of an inch. They should not have SMP done on the bald patch unless they are planning to shave down the surrounding hair, otherwise the bald spot will have a shaved appearance that will not match the longer hair around it.