

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 did not receive the growth they were hoping for or 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.
- There are a few methods that can be used during SMP to achieve different looks. Consultation is especially useful to determine which tattooing method(s) will best achieve your desired results.
- Sessions are generally performed at least 2 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 2 weeks after SMP.
- You may switch to a non-alcohol based minoxidil.
- Have a light breakfast. You may bring snacks if you have a longer procedure scheduled.
- Arrange for transportation back home as you will be having light sedation during your procedure and you cannot drive afterwards.

Post-Operative Instructions

- Your scalp will exfoliate over the weeks following the SMP procedure. Sharp dots will not appear as defined as they did on the first day.
- After your procedure, lightly rinse the area with plain water in the shower. Do not use shampoos or conditioners and do not soak the scalp for three days following the session. Avoid saunas and steam rooms during this time as well.
- Do not use Rogaine (minoxidil) or other products containing alcohol. It is advised to switch to a non-alcohol based formulation of minxodil.
- Do not do strenuous exercise for three days.
- Your scalp may become dry and itchy following the procedure. If this happens, apply organic oils (coconut, Argan etc.) or Vaseline (petrolatum) to the area, but do not soak excessively. If it does not improve, the doctor may prescribe a prescription medication for the itching.
- Wear sunscreen and a hat in bright sunlight for at least two weeks. After two weeks, sunscreen alone is OK.
- Avoid chlorine submersion indefinitely as it may discolor the dyes. This is not a good procedure for swimmers! A swimmer's cap can help prevent discoloration.

FAQs

Q: How long until the final result from SMP can be seen?

A: Most patients require 2-4 sessions to achieve the final result. We generally advise waiting about 2 weeks between sessions to allow the top layers of skin to shed so that we can accurately fill-in any residual areas.

Q: What is the difference between SMP and a regular tattoo?

A: A regular tattoo is generally performed in a tattoo parlor by someone who is not a medical professional. The pigment is deposited deeper into the skin, in a region called the dermis, at a depth of 3.5 mm. The needles used are thick and carry lots of pigment.

In contrast, SMP is performed under medical supervision with special equipment that is different from the devices used in tattoo parlors. The needles used in SMP are smaller and the tattoo depth is shallower than with regular tattoos. The technique is also different in that it is largely composed of dots rather than solid figures or long, curved lines. The ink in SMP is chosen to match your hair color and is designed to resist the discoloration seen with traditional tattoos. Importantly, SMP will fade and lighten, rather than discolor to an unnatural green-blue hue. Please note that SMP lightening or discoloration may occasionally occur.

Q: How long will SMP last?

A: SMP generally lasts 2-6 years. It will gradually lighten but should not discolor. Most patients will require touchups after this period.

Q: Will this damage my hair or cause side effects?

A: SMP generally does not penetrate deep enough to cause trauma to the hair follicles. There is a potential for allergy to the dye, but this has only been seen in rare cases. The most common side effect is discomfort and redness after treatment.

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: Is receiving an SMP treatment painful?

A: The discomfort experienced during an SMP procedure depends on the person. Some areas of the scalp (hairline, temples, scar tissue) are more sensitive than others. Patients generally describe the sensation as “irritating” or “uncomfortable” rather than painful. If you do have any pain during your treatment, we can administer local anesthesia or prescribe pain medication. Once the entire treatment session is finished you may feel slight tenderness, as if you received a sunburn. Occasionally, some patients report having a headache.

Q: How much does SMP cost?

A: Price of SMP depends upon the area of the scalp to be covered, the desired density, and if any scars are present. The price will be discussed at your consultation and arranged in writing beforehand. Most patients will need a minimum of 2-3 sessions to complete a procedure. In general, pricing varies between \$1,000 - \$5,000 per session and is primarily based on the size of the area that needs to be treated.

Q: How long is a typical SMP session?

A: Most appointments, including touch-ups, take 2-5 hours. You will be scheduled for the appropriate length of time that is approximately needed to complete a given session.

Q: How soon after my SMP treatment can I return to work?

A: You may return to work the day after receiving an SMP procedure. The redness and swelling will subside around days 1-3. If you had a scar treated, the redness and swelling will last a bit longer and generally subside after 10-14 days.