

B12lite

Breast Reconstruction with an Implant or Tissue Expander

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This document will give you information about a breast reconstruction with an implant or tissue expander. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What is a breast reconstruction with an implant or tissue expander?

A breast reconstruction is an operation to recreate a breast shape after you have had a mastectomy. Your surgeon will use a breast implant or tissue expander to recreate the shape of a breast.

What are the benefits of a breast reconstruction with an implant or tissue expander?

If the operation is successful, you will have a breast shape again. The reconstruction should give you a cleavage when you wear a bra.

Are there any alternatives to a breast reconstruction with an implant or tissue expander?

Using padded bras or inserts in bras can give the appearance of a breast shape when you are wearing clothes.

It is possible to recreate a breast shape using only tissue from elsewhere in your body.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes between one and two hours.

If you have already had a mastectomy there is usually not enough skin to recreate a breast shape so you will need an expandable implant (tissue expander) to stretch your skin. Your surgeon will make a cut in the front of your chest over the mastectomy scar, or at the lower end of your new breast.

If the reconstruction is being performed at the same time as the mastectomy, your surgeon will usually be able to leave most of the skin on your breast, allowing them to place a permanent silicone implant to recreate a breast shape. Your surgeon will create a pocket under the muscle to place the tissue expander or implant in (see figure 1).

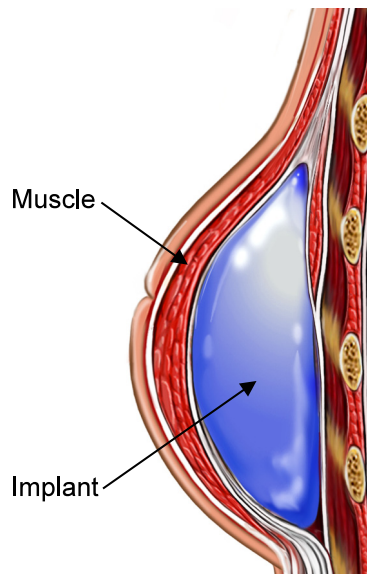


Figure 1
Breast reconstruction

What kind of breast implant should I choose?

All implants are made of an outer layer (shell) of silicone. They can be filled with silicone, salt water (saline) or both. The silicone used to fill the implant can be in the form of a liquid or gel (cohesive silicone). Liquid silicone and saline implants give a softer and more natural feel. Cohesive silicone implants give a firmer feel and can come in more shapes, so they are often recommended to women who are having breast reconstruction.

If you do not have enough skin or you have already had a mastectomy, your surgeon may need to use a tissue expander.

Is silicone safe?

Many studies have been carried out to find if silicone breast implants are safe. There is no evidence to suggest that women who have silicone breast implants are at a higher risk of getting diseases such as breast cancer and arthritis. There is a reported link between having an implant and a rare type of cancer called anaplastic large-cell lymphoma. However, the increased risk is very small.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications of any operation

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots

2 Specific complications of this operation

a Breast reconstruction complications

- Developing a lump under the wound
- Wound breakdown
- Skin necrosis
- Difference in shape and appearance
- Numbness or persistent pain around the armpit or the inner part of the arm
- Permanent numbness around the scar on the chest

b Implant complications

- Developing a collection of fluid in the pocket where the implant is
- Infection of the implant
- Thickening and tightening of the scar tissue
- Kinking and rippling
- Rupture or deflation of the implant
- Failure of the reconstruction

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after two to three days. Most women return to normal activities within four to six weeks.

Wearing a soft, well-fitted bra will help to relieve any discomfort.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

If you have an expandable implant, you will need to come back to the clinic regularly over the next few months so your surgeon can gradually fill the implant with fluid.

The shape of your reconstructed breast will take several weeks to settle down. It can take up to a year for your reconstructed breast to feel part part of you.

Summary

A breast reconstruction with a breast implant or tissue expander is a cosmetic operation to recreate a breast shape. You should consider the options carefully and have realistic expectations about the results.

Acknowledgements

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