

BREAST CANCER RECONSTRUCTION

Tina (name changed), a 41 year old lady underwent Mastectomy for breast cancer. She is keen on having Breast reconstruction

What is breast reconstruction?

Breast reconstruction is the creation of a new breast shape using surgery. It is done after removal of a whole breast (mastectomy). The new breast shape can be created using an implant and/or patient's own tissue from another part of the body, usually the back or lower abdomen. Reconstructed breasts don't usually have a nipple but one can be created with surgery.

It is important to remember that a reconstructed breast will not look or feel exactly the same as the breast that one has lost – it will often be a slightly different size and shape. Also, the feeling of a reconstructed breast will not be the same – there may be no sensation at all.

A natural breast will change over time and droop as one gets older. But reconstructed breasts (especially following implant-based reconstruction) will not change in the same way. So over time the differences between a natural and reconstructed breast may become more obvious. In general women find the results acceptable and, especially when dressed, say they feel confident about the way they look.

There are usually different options available for breast reconstruction and the surgeon should explain which option is likely to be the best option. Sometimes surgery on a remaining breast is suggested to help with evenness and balance. This might be done at the same time as the reconstruction or later. Also important to remember that having a breast reconstruction will not increase the chances of the breast cancer coming back.

Who can have a reconstruction?

Breast reconstruction can be done at the same time as the cancer surgery(immediate reconstruction) or months, even years, later (delayed reconstruction).

If it is likely that if the patient needs radiotherapy after mastectomy to the chest wall, it would be advisable to have delayed reconstruction as radiotherapy can increase the risk of hard scar tissue forming around an implant and can also affect a reconstruction that uses patient's own tissue, making the breast feel firmer and reducing its size. Because of these factors, if radiotherapy is a likely treatment, patient may be advised to delay reconstruction for up to 12 months.

Some people are advised not to have a breast reconstruction because of other existing medical conditions that might increase the risk of problems and complications following surgery.

Reasons for having reconstruction

Surgery for breast cancer is likely to affect how one looks and feels in some way. Some women find it harder than others to come to terms with losing one or both of their breasts. After having a mastectomy, women can be concerned about the shape of their bodies and the look of their breast area under clothes. While some women prefer to wear an external breast form (prosthesis) inside their bra to restore their shape, others prefer not to. Everyone is different, and what matters is that each individual choice as what suits them best. There is no right or wrong way.

Reconstruction can be an important part of treatment that helps emotional recover and wellbeing. Like many women, one may choose breast reconstruction because breasts are an important part of body image, self-esteem and sexuality. How the partner feels may also play a part.

Who should do reconstruction?

Reconstruction should be carried out by a specialist oncoplastic breast surgeon(a surgeon trained in plastic surgery techniques) or a plastic surgeon trained in breast reconstruction. The surgeon must explain realistic expectations of how the reconstructed breast will look. One should not go ahead until all the facts are explained in detail – therefore counselling is a very important part of preparation of patient for breast reconstruction

Immediate versus Delayed reconstruction

A patient can choose to have a reconstruction at the time of primary cancer surgery (immediate reconstruction) or months, or even years, after breast surgery, so that there is plenty of time to make a decision (delayed reconstruction).During this time the lady may adapt to having had mastectomy and feel that she may no longer want to go through further surgery

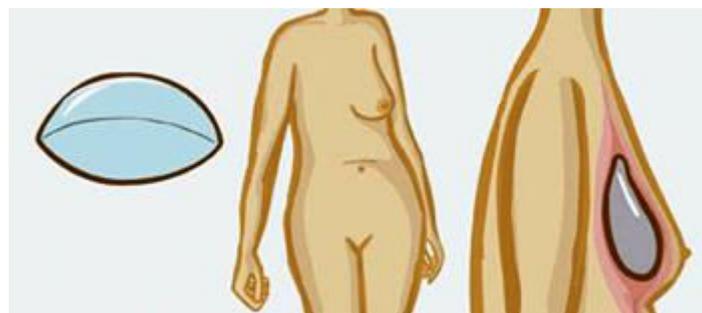
Types of reconstruction

There are two main types of breast reconstruction:

- reconstruction using only a breast implant.
- reconstruction using patient's own tissue (a tissue flap) with or without an implant.

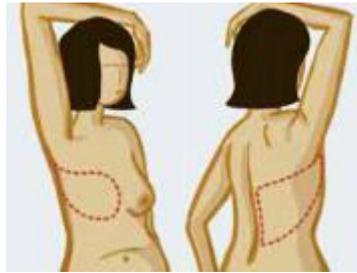
SOME COMMONLY PERFORMED RECONSTRUCTION PROCEDURES

RECONSTRUCTION USING IMPLANT



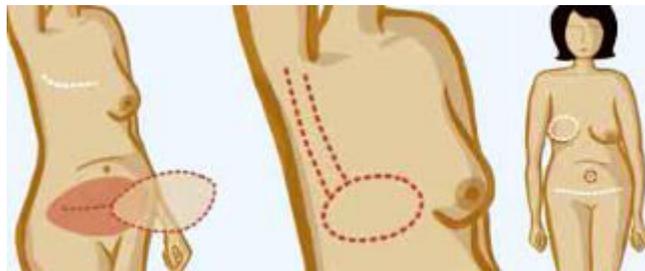
Courtesy: Breast Cancer Care, UK

RECONSTRUCTION USING MUSCLE FROM BACK (**LATISMUS DORSI FLAP**)



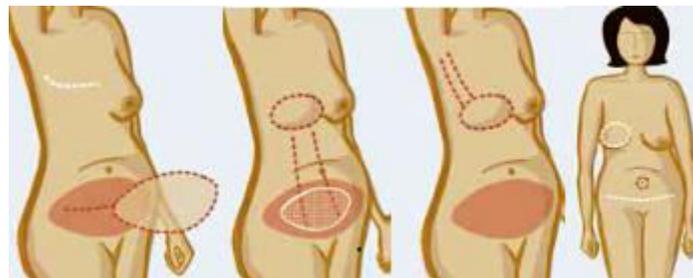
Courtesy: Breast Cancer Care, UK

RECONSTRUCTION USING SKIN & FAT FROM ABDOMEN (**DIEP FLAP**)



Courtesy: Breast Cancer Care, UK

RECONSTRUCTION USING THE LARGE MUSCLE THAT RUNS FROM LOWER RIBS TO PELVIC BONE (**TRAM FLAP**)



Courtesy: Breast Cancer Care, UK
