



*Better
Together*

Patient information

Advice and Information for Patients Considering Breast Reduction Surgery

Surgical Directorate – Breast Services

It is a big step to undertake breast surgery on the healthy breast. You need to be aware of what the operation entails and of the potential complications.

Outlined below is some information to help you decide if Breast Reduction is the operation for you.

What is Breast Reduction Surgery?

The operation means removing breast tissue and skin to make your breast(s) smaller. At the same time the shape of your breast is altered and your nipple moved. This operation will leave long scars.

The scars will often form a thin white line, but some patients will form red, raised, unsightly scars. The scars will also be more obvious if there are complications. There may be alternative treatments or procedures. Please ask a doctor or nurse to discuss these with you.

What are the benefits of Breast Reduction Surgery?

This operation will reduce the size of your breast(s). This may reduce neck or back pain, but this cannot be guaranteed.

Your Consultant will be able to show you pictures of other women who have had this operation.

Your Consultant will also ask you to have pictures taken before and after your operation. Your permission will be needed for this.

What are the risks of Breast Reduction Surgery?

- The nipple is moved so sensation is lost. Breast-feeding is usually not possible after this operation.
- Because skin is removed, the shape of your breast is altered. An exact shape cannot be guaranteed.
- You will be asked what size you would like your breasts, but we cannot guarantee a particular bra size. There is likely to be a small difference in size between your breasts, this is normal, as everyone's breasts are different in size. Usually with this type of surgery there are limits on how small the breasts can be made, because of the width of the breast and breast tissue has to remain under the nipple.
- **Wound Breakdown.** The wound may breakdown, particularly under the breast. This will heal, but can leave unsightly scars. A skin graft or prolonged dressings, over a period of weeks or months, may be needed. If this happens, your scars will be wider. The wound may also become infected. Please contact your Consultant Secretary.
- **Loss of the nipple.** Due to the loss of underlying breast tissue. This may require prolonged dressings and / or further surgery.
- **Abnormal position of the nipple.** Your nipple may end up in a position you feel is too high or too low.
- **Breast size.** We will do our best to get your breasts the size you wish, but you may consider that your breasts are too small or too large after your operation.

- **Haematoma.** This is when blood collects under the wound and appears hard, swollen and painful. This can require a further operation, and / or a blood transfusion.

What happens if I refuse this treatment option?

If you decide not to undergo the procedure your breasts will remain the same as they are now and any related conditions such as back pain will remain.

What are the alternatives?

If your breasts are causing you back problems wearing a well fitted bra can sometimes help.

Sometimes losing weight can help.

What sort of anaesthetic will be given to me?

You will be given a general anaesthetic. General anaesthesia is drug-induced unconsciousness. It is always provided by an anaesthetist, who is a doctor with specialist training.

Unfortunately, general anaesthesia can cause side effects and complications. Side effects are common, but are usually short-lived: they include nausea, confusion and pain. Complications are rare, but can cause lasting injury: they include awareness, paralysis and death.

The risks of anaesthesia and surgery are lower for those who are undergoing minor surgery, and who are young, fit, active and well. You will be given an opportunity to discuss anaesthetic options and risks with an anaesthetist before your surgery.

If you are worried about any of these risks, please speak to your Consultant or a member of their team.

Getting ready for your operation

- You will usually be seen in the pre-operative clinic. Here you will have blood tests (including a sample in case you need a blood transfusion), a chest X-ray, and sometimes a heart trace.
- A photograph is taken to record the shape and size of your breasts.
- The staff will ask routine questions about your health, the medicine you take at the moment and any allergies you may have.
- You will be asked to have nothing to eat or drink from 12 o'clock midnight the day before your operation.

The day of your operation

- You will usually come into hospital on the day of your operation.
- The surgeon will see you again to make some marks on your body to help guide the operation.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form to say you understand the procedure, and what the operation involves. Again, you will be able to discuss the operation with your surgeon.

What should I expect after my operation?

- When you return to the ward you will often have a plastic tube coming from each breast that has been operated on. These tubes are to make sure blood does not collect inside your breasts. These tubes will be removed as soon as the fluid drainage has reduced.
- A nurse will check your pulse, blood pressure, breathing rate and wound regularly. **It is important that if you feel any pain you must tell the nursing staff, who can give you painkillers to help.**
- The nursing staff will also advise you when you can start taking sips of water. Anaesthetics can make some people sick. If you feel sick we advise you not to drink until this feeling has passed. The nursing staff may offer an injection to help this sick feeling go away.
- **The first time you get out of bed, please make sure you ask a nurse to be with you. This is in case you feel dizzy.**

Going Home

You will usually be in hospital for one, sometimes two nights, although this sometimes can be longer.

Discharge Information

Pain relief and medication

The nursing staff will advise you about painkillers before you leave the hospital. Please tell the nurses what painkilling tablets you have at home.

Your wound

The ward will tell you when and where to get your dressing changed. This may include a district nurse visiting you at home or at clinic. Please inform ward staff if you are staying at a different address on discharge.

Simple tape is all that is required. Keep this in place until you are seen in clinic. Dissolving stitches are usually used and these disappear within three months. Leakage from the scar line often occurs. This is normal and a simple dry dressing is applied to protect your clothes.

Bra

It is important that once the drains have been removed, you wear your bra at all times for the first month. We advise you to wear a soft sports bra, as you will be swollen. We recommend the bra is very supportive and has wide elastic panels, which are necessary to mould the breast tissue into a good shape.

It is for this reason you should wear this bra both night and day, only removing when you wash. You will need measuring for a new bra after your surgery. Many large stores do this.

Getting back to normal

- This is a big operation, and you will take some weeks – even months – to recover. It is normal to feel more tired than usual for a few weeks after having an operation. This will pass.
- No heavy lifting for at least three weeks, as it can put pressure on the muscle underneath your breasts.
- Do not drive a car for two to three weeks after your operation. You may find wearing a seatbelt can be uncomfortable.

- A healthy, nutritional diet will encourage the healing of scars.
- Please do not smoke. If you do smoke it is advisable you stop as soon as you know the date of your surgery. Smoking can greatly reduce the rate at which you heal.

Returning to work

- You can self-certify for the first seven days of sickness. After this, a medical certificate (Fit note) may be issued by your hospital doctor to cover the expected time off you will need after being discharged.
- Advice on returning to work will be given.

Further Appointments

You will be seen in the surgical clinic about ten days after your operation. You will be given the time and date of your appointment before you leave hospital.

Further information

Your Consultant, Breast Reconstruction Nurse and the Breast Care Nurses have pictures of patients who have had this type of breast reconstruction. If you wish to see these pictures, or perhaps talk to someone who has had this operation, or have any other questions, please feel free to ask them.

The Breast Care Nurses

Tel: 0151 706 2927 (24 hour answerphone)
Text phone number: 1800 10151 706 2927

Author: Breast Directorate

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