

Breast Reconstruction: A Decision-Making Tool

Breast reconstruction surgery can be done after a mastectomy to create the appearance of a breast. The goal of reconstruction is to have a normal appearing breast in a bra or under clothes, but not when you are naked. Your reconstructive breast may look different than your natural breast. Breast reconstruction can be done during your mastectomy (immediate reconstruction) or at a later time (delayed reconstruction). There is a reduced risk of complications following a delayed reconstruction.

There are risks with any type of surgery. About 3 out of 10 women have complications after breast reconstruction surgery. It is important to talk with your doctor to learn about your potential risk for complications.



Breast reconstruction may include a number of steps and multiple surgical procedures. It is important to talk with your plastic surgeon about each type of breast reconstruction surgery to help you decide which surgery is best for you.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Things to Consider	Tissue Expanders / Implants	Abdominal Tissue Flap	Latissimus Flap
Length of Surgery (not including mastectomy)	1 hour	6 to 10 hours	4 to 6 hours
Time Spent in the Hospital	1 day	3 to 5 days	2 to 3 days
Recovery Period	2 to 4 weeks	6 to 12 weeks	4 to 6 weeks
Use of Implant	Always	Rare	Often
Final Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes excellent • Increased chance of firmness • Increased chance of asymmetry • Breast is round and does not droop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often excellent • Most natural • Soft to touch • Flatter belly (abdomen) • If unilateral reconstruction is done, revision of other breast is possible for symmetry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often excellent • More natural appearance than implant only

Things to Consider	Tissue Expanders / Implants	Abdominal Tissue Flap	Latissimus Flap
<p>Highly Recommended for Patients who:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want a shorter surgery and recovery time • Do not have enough back or abdominal tissue • Have small breasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want the most natural looking breast • Are healthy enough for long surgery • Have enough time for recovery • Have enough abdominal tissue • Have had radiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have enough back tissue • Are healthy enough for moderate surgery • Have enough time for recovery • Have had radiation
<p>Less Recommended for Patients who:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke and have no plan to quit • Want the most natural looking breast • Find weekly visits for tissue expansion a problem • Who have had radiation therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke and have no plan to quit • Are not comfortable having a long surgery • Had abdominal surgery before, not including C-sections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke and have no plan to quit • Are not comfortable with implants