

## Important Questions to Ask

It is very important that you ask your surgeon as many questions as you need to before having breast reconstruction surgery. Here is a list of questions to get you started:

- ☐ Am I a candidate for breast reconstruction?
- ☐ When can I have reconstruction?
- ☐ What types of reconstruction are possible in my specific case?
- ☐ What is the average cost of each type? Does my insurance cover them?
- ☐ What type of reconstruction is best for me? Why?
- ☐ How much experience do you (plastic surgeon) have with this procedure?
- ☐ Will the reconstructed breast match my remaining breast in size?
- ☐ How will my reconstructed breast feel to the touch?
- ☐ What possible complications should I know about?
- ☐ How much discomfort or pain will I feel?
- ☐ How long will I be in the hospital?
- ☐ Will I need blood transfusions? If so, can I donate my own blood?
- ☐ How long is the recovery time?
- ☐ What type of wound care will I need to do at home?
- ☐ How much help will I need at home to take care of my drain and wound?
- ☐ When can I start my exercises?
- ☐ How much activity can I do at home?
- ☐ What do I do if I get swelling (lymphedema) in my arm?
- ☐ Will reconstruction interfere with chemotherapy?
- ☐ Will reconstruction interfere with radiation therapy?
- ☐ How long will the implant last?
- ☐ What kinds of changes to the breast can I expect over time?
- ☐ How will aging affect the reconstructed breast?



# ... A "C" Cup, Please

Yes or no to **breast reconstruction** after cancer diagnoses

By *Debbie Alberg*

Each year, more than 280,000 American women face the reality of breast cancer. Today, the emotional and physical results are very different from what they were in the past. Dr. Tamir Mosharrafa, a Phoenix plastic surgeon who specializes in breast reconstruction after a mastectomy, states, "We are gaining more knowledge and understanding of this disease and its treatment every day. A different approach in treatment, as well as advances in reconstructive surgery, mean that women who have breast cancer today have new and better choices."

If you are thinking about having reconstructive surgery, it is a good idea to discuss it with your surgeon and a plastic surgeon experienced in breast reconstruction before your mastectomy. This allows the surgical teams to plan the treatment that is best for you, even if you decide to wait and have reconstructive surgery later.

## Women Choose Breast Reconstruction for Different Reasons:

- To make their breasts look balanced when wearing a bra.
- To permanently regain breast contour.
- To attain the convenience of not needing an external prosthesis.

Dr. Mosharrafa adds: "You should decide to have breast reconstruction only after you are fully informed about the procedure. The reconstruction process may require two or more operations. Give yourself plenty of time to make the best decision for you."

## Options to Consider

Immediate reconstruction is done at the same time as the mastectomy. A bonus to immediate reconstruction is that the chest tissues will be undamaged by radiation therapy or scarring. Also, immediate reconstruction means one less surgery.

Delayed reconstruction is done after the mastectomy. For some women, this may be advised if radiation to the chest area is needed after the mastectomy. This is because the radiation therapy that follows breast reconstruction can increase complications after surgery.

## Important Factors to Consider:

- You have just been diagnosed with cancer. You may want to wait until the shock has passed after your breast cancer surgery to decide about reconstruction.
- You may simply not want to have any more surgery than is needed.
- Is it your preference to have chemotherapy or radiation therapy after reconstruction or wait and have surgery after all treatment is completed?
- Breast reconstruction restores the shape of the breasts but cannot restore your normal breast sensation.
- Your surgeon may suggest you wait for one reason or another. This may happen if you smoke or have other health conditions. Many surgeons require you to quit smoking at least two months before reconstructive surgery to allow for better healing.
- The surgeon may recommend surgery to reshape the remaining breast to match the reconstructed breast. This could include reducing or enlarging the size of the breast or lifting the breast.

## Two Main Types of Breast Reconstruction are:

- Reconstruction using an implant, in which an implant will replace breast tissue.
- Tissue flap reconstruction, in which skin, muscle and fat from your back or abdomen (tummy) is tunneled through to the chest to create a new breast.

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## Your Options with the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act

Under the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act (WHCRA) of 1998, group health plans, insurance companies and HMOs that offer mastectomy coverage must also provide coverage for reconstructive surgery after mastectomy. This coverage includes reconstruction of the breast removed by mastectomy; reconstruction of the other breast to produce a symmetrical appearance; breast prostheses; and treatment of physical complications at all stages of the mastectomy, including lymphedema (swelling that sometimes happens after treatment for breast cancer). This law sets a federal floor so that women can obtain breast reconstruction following mastectomy even if they live in states that do not require insurance companies to provide this coverage.

The WHCRA generally requires all group plans, insurance companies and HMOs to provide reconstructive surgery benefits, as long as the insurance plan also covers medical and surgical benefits for mastectomies. However, certain church and government plans may not be required to pay for reconstructive surgery. If you are insured under a church or government plan, check with your plan administrator about it. The law does not apply to Medicare and Medicaid.

## The WHCRA will not allow:

- Plans and insurance issuers to deny patients eligibility or continued eligibility to enroll or renew coverage under the plan to avoid the requirements of WHCRA.
- Plans and insurance issuers to provide incentives to or penalize doctors to cause them to provide care in a manner not supportive with WHCRA.

The law also requires insurance providers to notify you of this coverage at the time you enroll in their plan and every year after that. Several states have their own laws requiring health plans that cover mastectomies to provide coverage for reconstructive surgery after a mastectomy. However, not all health plans are subject to state law.

For more information about the Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act, visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org). ■

*Dr. Tamir Mosharrafa graduated with honors from the University of Texas in Austin. He then received his medical training at the prestigious Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. Dr. Mosharrafa is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgeons and is a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. His particular areas of expertise include breast surgery, body contouring and facial rejuvenation. For more information, check out [www.experiencethebestofyou.com](http://www.experiencethebestofyou.com).*