

Breast Reconstruction Surgery

What is breast reconstruction surgery?

Breast reconstruction is surgery to rebuild your breast after a mastectomy. A mastectomy is the removal of your breast to treat breast cancer or to prevent cancer (if you have a high risk of getting breast cancer).

Timing of breast reconstruction

You and your health care team will discuss the best time for you to have breast reconstruction. There are two options:

Immediate breast reconstruction is done at the same time as your mastectomy.

Immediate reconstruction is not always possible such as when:

- you have inflammatory breast cancer
- cancer is found in your lymph nodes
- you may choose to delay breast reconstruction surgery until fully recovered from mastectomy or other personal issues
- you need radiation treatment quickly after your mastectomy surgery

Delayed breast reconstruction is done at a later time.

If you have radiation to the breast you may need to wait at least 1 year after your breast is removed before having delayed breast reconstruction. This may reduce your risk of serious problems after surgery.

Types of breast reconstruction

Your breast surgeon will discuss options for breast reconstruction. You will then make all final decisions with your plastic surgeon. The two main types of reconstruction are implants or body tissue.

1. Saline or silicone implants: A permanent implant may be inserted at the time of the mastectomy. You may need to have an expander temporarily inserted in the breast area during the mastectomy surgery. The expander will be filled over time and eventually be replaced with a permanent implant.
2. Your own body tissue: Skin and the underlying fat or muscle can be taken from your stomach, back, thighs or buttock to rebuild your breast.

Are there risks associated with breast reconstruction?

There are risks with each type of breast reconstruction. Your surgeon will discuss all the risks and benefits of the different timings and types of breast reconstruction.

Is follow-up required?

You will need to have follow-up appointments with your health care team.

- Mammograms are not done on a reconstructed breast. Follow-up checks may be performed by a physical examination of your chest wall and breasts.
- You may need imaging to check for cancer or if you have changes or unusual symptoms in your reconstructed breast, such as lumps or skin changes.

Can everyone have breast reconstruction surgery?

Breast reconstruction may not be possible for everyone. For example, breast reconstruction is not recommended if:

- you are a smoker
- you have a medical condition such as obesity or diabetes
- your cancer is at an advanced stage.

These things can put you at a greater risk of serious problems after surgery.

Is there a cost to breast reconstruction?

- If you have a valid Ontario health card there is no cost for breast reconstruction.

Where will my breast reconstruction occur?

Four hospitals in our region offer breast reconstruction including:

- Hamilton Health Sciences
- St. Joseph's Hospital
- Joseph Brant Hospital
- Niagara Health: St. Catharine's Site

Your breast surgeon will review your options, so you can make a decision that is right for you. For more information a referral may be made to a plastic surgeon.