

Breast Reconstruction

Breast reconstruction is a favoured procedure for many women who, due to cancer or other illness, have undergone breast removal (mastectomy), and wish to maintain their womanly figure.

What is it?

- A breast reconstruction is an operation to restore the shape of the breast following surgical removal (mastectomy) because of breast cancer or other illness
- There are two reconstruction methods used, depending upon your preference: Implant reconstruction, using an artificial implant or tissue reconstruction, using tissue from another area of your body

What is involved?

Implant Reconstruction

- If you choose an implant reconstruction, your surgeon will insert a pre-formed silicone or saline solution breast implant that matches your desired dimensions under the skin where your breast used to be
- If your skin has been pulled tight following your mastectomy, it may be necessary to use a skin expander, often called a balloon expander, to stretch the skin enough to accommodate the implant
- The expander is then filled with salt water solution over a period of time to assist in expanding the tissue gradually
- Once the required size is achieved, your surgeon will reconstruct you areola (the dark area surrounding the nipple) and the procedure is complete
- If your reconstruction is carried out at the same time as your mastectomy, the entire process is likely to take around 2 to 3 hours
- You will require a general anaesthetic and you will need to stay in hospital overnight

Tissue Reconstruction

- If you prefer not to have any foreign material in your body, your surgeon will take some tissue from either your back or stomach to recreate your new breast
- This type of procedure, known as flap reconstruction, is generally regarded as more complex and is likely to leave several prominent scars around your body

- Tissue reconstructions may require several different operations lasting up to 3 hours each, all of which will require a general anaesthetic and an overnight stay in hospital

Your recovery

- Your recovery will depend upon which procedure you have
- You should expect to recover fully from an implant reconstruction within six to eight weeks
- A tissue reconstruction can take longer

Things to be aware of

- You will feel sore for a few days after your operation. Other risks include bleeding, seeping and possible infection
- If you opt to have your reconstruction at the same time, or immediately following mastectomy, your risk of complications is reduced because you are having just one operation instead of two
- Whichever procedure you choose, it is important to remember that whilst every effort is made to make your breast as life-like as possible, it will not be a perfect replica of the breast that was removed

Your results

- Breast reconstruction is permanent, although you must expect some change in appearance to develop over time