

## BREAST REDUCTION SURGERY

### What is a breast reduction?

This is a surgical procedure that reduces the size of the breasts and moves the nipple to a better position giving a lift as well.

### Who is the operation for?

Large breasts can cause significant physical and emotional issues for women, including shoulder and back pains, rashes and irritation of the skin under the breasts, cutting in of bra straps and unwanted attention in social situations. Breast reduction surgery can help eliminate all of these problems.

### Surgical technique

Breast reduction surgery involves removing the excess weight from the breast, whilst leaving the nipple attached and moving it to a higher position on the breast mound. This typically leaves scars around the areolar (the dark disc around the nipple), a vertical scar from the areolar to the crease under the breast and a scar in the crease under the breast of varying lengths. Examples of breast reduction scars can be found on my website at [www.mattvenus.co.uk/gallery](http://www.mattvenus.co.uk/gallery).

The surgery is carried out under a general anaesthetic, with the patient asleep. It takes 2.5 to 3 hours to perform and requires 1 night in hospital.

### What are the consequences and possible complications of surgery?

With any surgery, there are **consequences** (things that will happen to most patients) and **unwanted consequences**, also known as complications. Everything is done to help prevent complications, but they sometimes happen despite our best efforts.

### Smoking

Patients are always advised that **smoking before their procedure will increase complication rates**.

During a combined augmentation-breast lift, the nipple must be repositioned and the blood supply to the nipple relies on a stalk ("pedicle") of skin and breast tissue. The blood supply will be reduced in smokers and so the risk of the nipple dying increases. Nicotine, carbon monoxide, and many other toxic tobacco by-products interfere with the dynamics of normal wound healing.

**Patients must stop smoking for four weeks before and four weeks after surgery.**

## Common complications

Wound infection is perhaps the most common early complication (within 5-7 days of surgery). Such infections, which generally respond well to antibiotics, are usually superficial. Although small areas of wound breakdown are sometimes noted, these heal well over a few weeks when the wound is dressed regularly.

## Uncommon and rarer complications

As with every surgical procedure or operation, there are always risks. Although serious complications of breast reduction are uncommon, they can include:

- **Nerve injury** leading to changes in sensation or numbness in the nipple, which may last several months or may be permanent
- **Nerve injury** leading to numbness in the skin, which may last several months or may be permanent
- Collections of fluid under the skin (**seromas**) which may require removal in the out-patient clinic on several visits using a needle and syringe
- **Recurrent ptosis** (droop), which is inevitable with the passage of time
- **Copious bleeding** requiring a return to theatre to remove the blood and seal the blood vessels.
- **Fat necrosis** occurs when fat cells lose blood flow and die. The liquefied fat cells can then harden underneath the skin over time, causing lumpiness.
- **Poor wound healing** (hypertrophic or keloid scar). In these instances, the scar can permanently thicken, turn red, be painful and disfiguring. Usually it takes up to 12 months for a wound to heal and demonstrate the final result.
- **Necrosis** (skin death) generally occurs in patients who have not stopped smoking before their operation. With this condition, the skin dies and there is an open wound of variable size. Generally, if this wound is dressed daily, it will heal up in a couple of months, with the final result usually quite acceptable.
- **Additional procedures**, such as scar revision
- **Chronic pain**, a very rare complication
- All surgery leaves scars, some more visible than others. Although good wound healing after a surgical procedure is expected, **abnormal scars** may occur within the skin and deeper tissues. Scars may be unattractive and of different colour than surrounding skin. Scar appearance may also vary within the same scar, exhibiting contour variations and “bunching” due to the amount of excess skin. Scars may also be asymmetrical (having a different appearance between the right and left side of the body). There is also the possibility of visible marks in the skin from sutures. In some cases scars may require surgical revision or treatment.
- **Blood clots in the legs or lungs** (DVT/PE) are uncommon but serious complications. You should stop taking HRT or the oral contraceptive pill 4 weeks before surgery and use alternative methods in this time.

## What should I do after surgery?

Generally, the majority of patients stay for one post-operative night. Prior to discharge, you'll receive pain medication that can be taken at home. As you are still in the recovery phase of the operation when discharged, it's important to arrange in advance for someone to assist you for the first week following your operation. All patients are encouraged to walk as soon as possible after their procedures to prevent complications and to ensure blood flow quickly returns to normal. However, vigorous exercise should be avoided. You will need to wear a supportive bra for up to 6 weeks after the surgery to help protect the breasts and to aid in reducing the swelling.

## **Around the house**

Recovery takes three to four weeks. Although each patient's recovery is unique, most feel groggy for at least a week. During this time avoid lifting and strenuous movements. Sutures are usually dissolvable and do not need to be removed. However, if permanent sutures are required, they are generally removed within one to two weeks. Swelling and bruising takes about four to six weeks to disappear. Scars will remain visible although they will continue to fade for up to two years. Strenuous physical activity should be avoided for four weeks as this can produce bleeding, bruising and increased swelling, as well as putting strain on the closure of the skin, thereby risking wound disruptions.

## **Return to work**

Most patients can return to work after one week. However, if your job involves strenuous physical activity, you will need two to four weeks of recovery time before returning.

## **Driving**

Allow around 2-4 weeks of recovery time before driving.