

Breast Balancing Procedures for Breast Reconstruction

This booklet will give you information about:

- The options for breast balancing procedures
- How to prepare for your breast balancing procedure
- Care after your surgery
- Who to call with questions



What are the options for breast balancing procedures?

There are 3 main types of breast balancing procedures:

1. **Mastopexy:** an operation done to lift the nipple and areola (known as the nipple-areolar complex) on the unaffected breast and shape the breast to make it look more like the breast that has been/is being reconstructed. Usually your bra cup size will stay the same or may be slightly smaller.
2. **Reduction:** an operation done to reduce the size of the unaffected breast to make it look more like the breast that has been/is being reconstructed. This also lifts the nipple-areolar complex and makes it smaller. Your bra cup size will be smaller.
3. **Augmentation:** an operation done to enlarge the unaffected breast to make it look more similar to the breast that has been/is being reconstructed. This involves the use of an implant, and is more common if an implant was used during your affected breast's reconstruction. Your bra cup size will be larger.

What should I know before my breast balancing surgery?

- Your breasts will be close in size and shape to each other, but may not be exactly the same.
- You will have scars, and may have changes in nipple sensation.
- You will still have mammograms and may need to have extra views because of scars in the breast tissue after surgery or to see as much of the breast tissue as possible around an implant.
- You will be off work for about 2-3 weeks.
- You will NOT be able to lift more than 10 pounds or do aerobic exercise for 6 weeks.
- You will need help with shopping, housework and childcare for at least 2-3 weeks.
- You will NOT be able to drive until you are off all pain medications and you are able to twist and turn to check blind spots (2-3 weeks).
- It will take about 3 months for the breast to settle and for swelling to go down.

How do I get ready for my surgery date?

Now:

- DO NOT smoke – people who quit smoking before surgery heal faster and have a lower risk of complications. Check out sunnybrook.ca/quitsmoking for help.
- Purchase a surgical bra - the plastic surgery team will tell you where to buy a bra.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle.

10 days before surgery:

- STOP taking herbal supplements, Vitamin E and anti-inflammatory medications (i.e. Advil). (You can restart these medications 5 days after your surgery.)

**If you are unsure whether you should stop taking a medication, ask your Plastic Surgeon.

- Arrange for someone to drive you home after the surgery and stay with you for the first night at home.

The night before surgery:

- Shower with a surgical scrub soap.
- DO NOT eat or drink after midnight.

The morning of your surgery:

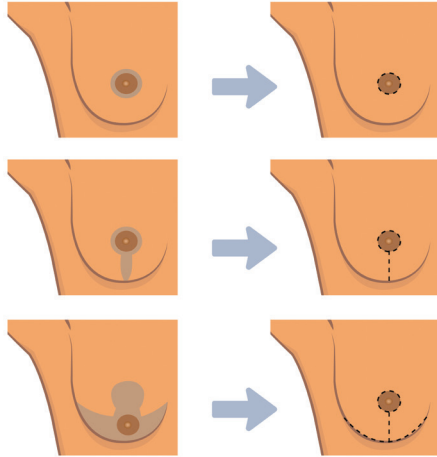
- Do NOT eat or drink.
- Shower again with a surgical scrub soap.
- Do not wear jewelry. Remove any piercings.
- Bring loose-fitting, comfortable clothing and supportive slip-on shoes.
- Shirts with buttons/zippers in the front are easier to put on after surgery.
- Bring your surgical bra with you right up to the operating room.

What will happen during my balancing surgery?

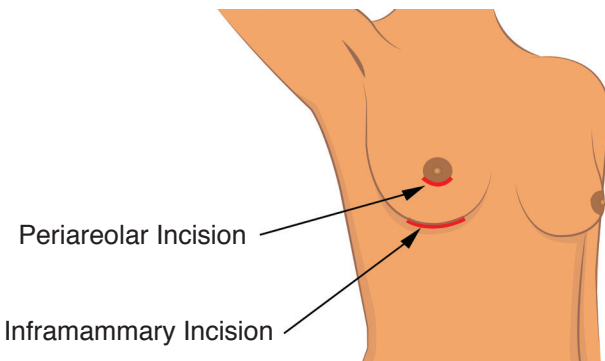
- Your breast will be marked by the plastic surgeon before you are put to sleep with general anaesthesia (a drug).

- You will have compression stockings on your lower legs to prevent blood clots.
- You will take medications before the surgery to help manage pain after the surgery.
- You will be asleep during the surgery so you will not feel any pain.
- You will take antibiotics in the operating room to prevent infection.
- Once you are asleep, incisions (cuts) will be made on the breast that will leave scars (see next page).
- If any breast tissue is removed during the procedure, it will be sent to pathology to be checked for breast cancer or other abnormalities.
- Your incisions will be closed with dissolving sutures (stitches that absorb into the skin) and covered with dressings that will stay in place for several weeks after the surgery.
- The operation will be about 2-3 hours.
- The pattern of the scars will depend on which type of balancing procedure you are having. Your plastic surgeon will tell you in advance which incision (cut) will be used for you.

Mastopexy or Reduction: the scar may be just around the areola, or more likely it will have a vertical extension ('lollipop'), possibly with an extra part along the fold of the breast ('anchor' or 'inverted T'). These scars will have paper tapes over them when you wake up.



Augmentation: the scar will likely be along the fold below the breast (inframammary incision), and this would have a clear plastic bandage over it when you wake up. Sometimes the scar will be partway around the areola (periareolar incision), and this would be covered with paper tapes or a clear plastic bandage.



What will happen after surgery?

- Your surgical bra that you brought with you will be put on you before you wake up from the operation.
- You will likely go home on the same day as the procedure.
- You will get pain medications while you are in the hospital.
- You will be told to avoid stress or pressure in the breast area.
- The plastic surgeon or nurse will set up follow up for you through the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) if you have a drain put in at the time of surgery. Otherwise, CCAC is not needed.

What happens after I leave the hospital?

Take the pain medication prescribed to you by the surgeon as directed. It is important to be comfortable enough to keep moving.

As your pain gets better over time, you may want to use pain medication only at bedtime. You may get a prescription for antibiotics to prevent infection if the surgeon feels this is needed. Take that prescription as directed.

Wound Care

Incisions (cuts) that are covered with paper tapes or a transparent bandages should be left in place until you see the plastic surgeon for your follow-up appointment. Continue to wear your surgical bra.

If the tapes come off and your incisions are open to air, put on Vaseline or Polysporin ointment (NOT cream) twice a day until your first follow-up appointment with the plastic surgeon.

- DO NOT use heating pads or cold compresses on your breasts. Your sensation may change from the surgery and it will be hard to know if the hot or cold is damaging the tissues.

Bathing

You can shower 48 hours after the surgery, unless you have drains. If you do have drains, you may shower normally once the drains are removed.

Keep the paper tapes or clear plastic dressing on, but remove any gauze bandages that cover those tapes and remove the surgical bra before you shower.

After you shower, pat the tapes/incisions dry with a clean towel, and put your surgical bra back on.

- DO NOT take a bath or use a pool or hot tub until all your wounds have completely healed and your surgeon has said that it is safe to do so.
- DO NOT use very hot water.
- DO NOT use perfumed soaps or lotions on or around your incisions until they have completely healed.
- DO NOT use peroxide or antibacterial soaps.

Activity

Everyone heals differently and each person will be able to go back to activity at a different time.

Most people are able to start most of their regular activities 6 weeks after surgery.

Make sure you are comfortable and ready before you return to your normal activities.

For the first 2 weeks:

- DO NOT lift your arms/elbows above shoulder level until the plastic surgeon says it is OK (usually at the 2 week mark)
- DO NOT do activities like running or aerobics that cause your blood pressure to rise suddenly like running or aerobics.

For 4-6 weeks:

- DO NOT do activities such as high-impact aerobics, jogging or swimming for 6 weeks or until all wound edges have fully healed.
- DO NOT lift anything heavier than 10 pounds or do any heavy pushing, pulling or repetitive movements with the affected arm(s).

After 6 weeks:

- You MAY resume your exercise routine. Work up to your previous level of exercise slowly.
- If you do not have full arm and shoulder range of motion, you may need a referral for Physiotherapy.

Scar Management

Caring for your scar(s) after a balancing procedure is important for the final look of your scar(s) and for softening.

Protect all scars from the sun for at least 12 months.

AFTER your incisions have healed completely

- You can use Vaseline, unscented lotion, vitamin E (oil or cream) on the scar(s) twice a day.

- Massaging the scar(s) and the surrounding breast tissue in a circular motion twice a day can help to soften firm areas.
- Silicone topical ointment or silicone sheeting may be used if the scars are becoming thick or raised.
- Always test a small patch of skin first to make sure that you are not allergic to the product(s) you are going to use.

When will I see my plastic surgeon next?

- You will have an appointment to see the surgeon one week after surgery if you have an implant, or two weeks after surgery for any other balancing surgery.
- Other follow-up appointments will be based on your healing.
- You can be seen any time if you have a complication.

Possible complications to look for at home

- Hematoma: a collection of blood under the skin where the breast may become full, firm and look more bruised. You may need to have surgery to remove a hematoma.
- Seroma: a collection of serous fluid behind the breast that may cause new swelling or pain. Sometimes you can hear the fluid moving around in the breast, often described as a “sloshing” sound.

If it is large, a seroma can be drained in the clinic. If it is small, it will often go away on its own.

- Infection: can happen after any surgery. Signs include redness, tenderness, pus discharge, fever, breast swelling, or not feeling well. Infection is treated with antibiotics.
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT): a blood clot in the leg(s). This is a possible complication following surgery and bed rest. Signs include pain, tenderness, or swelling in the legs. You NEED to keep moving when you are at home to prevent blood clots from forming later. If a clot travels to the lung, this can be life-threatening. If you have shortness of breath or pain when breathing, go to the emergency department.

- **Wound Breakdown:** healing is slowed down because of poor blood supply to the area, and/or infection. Signs include areas of crusting or opening of the wound. If this happens, the surgeon will follow you regularly in the clinic.

When should I call my plastic surgeon?

Call your surgeon's office or the Louise Temerty Breast Centre Nursing Line if you think you may have a complication. Possible signs of early complications include:

Pain that gets worse

- Swelling, redness or discharge
- Temperature of 38 degrees Celsius (100.4 degrees Fahrenheit) or higher for over 24 hours
- Shortness of breath, chest pain, or trouble breathing

Who do I call after hours or on the weekend?

If you have questions after clinic hours, a plastic surgery resident is always on call. Call Sunnybrook Locating at 416-480-4244 and ask for the plastic surgery resident on call. If you cannot reach the resident, go to the nearest emergency department.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

Louise Temerty Breast Centre Nursing Line:
416-480-5000

Plastic Surgeon's Office: 416-480-6069



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