

**breast reduction**

**Be Your  
True Self**

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cosmetic surgery



# Be Your True Self



breast reduction

## What is Breast Reduction Surgery?

Breast reduction (sometimes known as reduction mammoplasty) is an operation designed to make large breasts smaller, lighter and more in proportion with the rest of your body. The operation can also be performed to make each breast a similar size if one side is much larger than the other.

Women with excessively large breasts may complain of having constant neck and back pain, painful grooves where bra straps have cut into the shoulders and skin irritation and rashes in the crease beneath the breast. People say that they cannot find clothes that fit, have poor posture and find many activities difficult due to the size of their breasts. In addition, unusually large breasts can make a person feel extremely self conscious and embarrassed.

If you have excessively large breasts, breast reduction surgery can help to relieve the physical and emotional symptoms caused by the size and weight of your breasts.

## What does the surgery involve?

There are a number of techniques that can be used for breast reduction. The one selected depends in part upon the amount of breast tissue that has to be removed and the quality of the skin.

Incisions (cuts) are made in order to sculpt the breasts into a smaller shape. The incisions may include one or more of the following:-

- Around the areola (the dark skin surrounding the nipple)
- Vertically down from the areola to the breast crease
- Horizontally in the breast crease



Excess breast tissue and skin is removed and the entire breast is reshaped with the nipples moved to a higher and more youthful position. The areola may also be made smaller to keep in proportion with the newly formed, smaller breasts. The incisions are stitched up in a way that reduces the scarring to a minimum.

The surgery takes between two to four hours to complete.

As a general rule, this procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic. You will be asleep during the procedure.

The operated area may be swollen for a few days and you will experience some pain. However, this is not usually severe and the area only pulls and hurts when you move around or cough. Simple painkillers are all that is normally required although aspirin should be avoided for the first few weeks following your operation.

Providing all is well, you can expect to go home the day after surgery.

## What are the risks and side effects of surgery?

Having cosmetic surgery can be a very positive experience. Complications are infrequent and usually minor. However, no surgery is without risk and it is important that you are given a clear picture.

A **haematoma**, a collection of blood in the wound, can occur although it is rare. Formation of a haematoma usually occurs within 24 hours following your operation. Large haematomas may need to be drained in the operating theatre, under a general anaesthetic.

**Infection** may occur but again this is rare. Infections are usually treated with antibiotics.

Your ability to heal is as individual as your hair or the colour of your eyes. In other words, your healing qualities are part of your genetic make up. **Poor or delayed healing** can occur. These healing difficulties range from minor problems such as small areas of wound separation to major issues, including some skin or nipple loss. Although very rare, this situation may require a skin graft to close the wound, meaning more surgery. People who have diabetes, smoke, are obese or elderly are at an increased risk of delayed healing.

Permanently **reduced nipple sensation** is common after this procedure. The ability of the nipple to go erect may also be affected.

Future **breast feeding** may not be possible as the surgery does involve removing some of the milk ducts that lead to the nipple area.

There is **always permanent scarring** where the incisions are made. Breast reduction surgery is a trade-off between large, uncomfortable breasts and smaller ones with scars. Although these usually fade and soften up to a

year after surgery, scars can occasionally thicken and stretch. Darker skinned people have more of a chance of forming thick scars (called hypertrophic and keloid scars). The scars are designed so they lie under the average bra or bikini top.

**Breast asymmetry/shape irregularities** can occur following this operation. In rare cases, further surgery is needed to correct this.

**Fat necrosis.** Sometimes, areas of fat and breast tissue within the breast form hard lumps. Usually, no specific treatment is required and the problem settles down over about 12 months.

General risks linked with any operation can occur. Formation of a blood clot in the leg (known as a **deep vein thrombosis**) can occur which would require treatment although the risk of this happening is very rare. Part of these clots can also break off and move up to the lungs. This is known as a **pulmonary embolus** or P.E. (very rare but can be life threatening). Developing a **chest infection** is rare but more likely to happen to people who smoke.

All the risks will be discussed in detail at your consultation. However, if you have further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to discuss these with your surgeon. Decisions about cosmetic surgery should never be rushed.

## How do I prepare for the consultation?

The surgeon will want to ask about your general health and past medical history, such as previous illnesses or operations, allergies, any drugs you are taking and whether or not you smoke. Make sure you tell your surgeon of any previous breast surgery, even if this was a long time ago.

Breast reduction surgery is not recommended for women who intend to breast feed as the operation can interfere with milk production. Therefore, in women of childbearing age, the surgeon will enquire whether breast feeding is important to you.

Let your surgeon know if you are planning on losing some weight as ideally, this should be done prior to surgery.

The surgeon will examine your breasts and also take some measurements. They will need to look at breast size and also the shape,

skin quality and nipple position. The breast tissue will be checked for any lumps. If you are over 40, the surgeon may refer you for a mammogram (breast x-ray). The surgeon will also wish to talk about the breast size and shape you are hoping to achieve.

After listening to your reasons for surgery, the surgeon will be able to discuss the results that surgery can offer.

All the implications and complications of your proposed surgery will be discussed in detail at your consultation. However, if you have further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to ask your surgeon. Decisions about cosmetic surgery should never be rushed.

## **How do I prepare for surgery?**

A mutually convenient date for your operation will be made. Prior to your admission, you may be invited to attend the hospital for a pre-operative assessment with a nurse. At this appointment, the nurse will explain what to expect when you come into hospital. Depending on your age and general health, routine blood tests and a heart tracing (an electrocardiogram or ECG) may be taken. You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have or raise any concerns.

If a general anaesthetic or sedation is given, you will be asked not to eat anything 6 hours prior to surgery. Black tea, black coffee and non fizzy drinks (nothing containing milk) can be taken up to 2 hours before surgery. Chewing gum should also be avoided for six hours before your operation.

If you smoke, you should consider giving up six weeks before your operation. The longer you give up beforehand, the better. Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen in the blood and can significantly increase the risk of healing problems after your operation. If you can't stop completely, cutting down will help.

It is important to inform your surgeon of any medication (prescription and over the counter) you take including any recreational drugs such as cocaine or cannabis. Medicines containing aspirin should be avoided for two weeks before the operation since they increase bleeding during surgery. You may also be asked to stop taking the contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy for a short time. Your surgeon will advise.

Arrange for someone to take you home after surgery if possible as you will not be able to drive yourself home afterwards.

## What happens after the operation?

Once you have recovered from your anaesthetic, you will be encouraged to sit up in bed.

A firm supportive dressing will be in place around the breast area. A small tube (called a drain) may be placed in each breast to drain off blood and fluid. These tubes are usually removed the next day, before you go home.

The dressings are usually removed after one to two weeks. You will be advised to wear a sports bra day and night for the next three to six weeks to give support and help to mould the breast tissue to its new shape. After this time, a bra should always be worn during the day. Avoid wearing an underwired bra for at least the first four weeks.

Before you leave the hospital, you will be given a follow up appointment to see either the surgeon and/or nurse. This is to check on your progress and also the wounds. If non dissolvable stitches have been used, these will be removed about 10 days after surgery.

You should not drive yourself home from hospital under any circumstances even the day after surgery. Ideally, you should have someone to stay with you for the first 24 to 48 hours and after to pop in now and again to lend a hand.



BEFORE  
Breast reduction

AFTER  
Breast reduction

## What is the estimated time for recovery, absence from work and return to usual activities?

Recovery times vary from one person to another so use the times given as a guide only. If you have any concerns during this period, do contact the hospital team for advice.

## Breast reduction post surgery timeline

| Day 1 to 7                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Week 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 4 to 6 weeks                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 6 to 9 months                                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>You may have some discomfort for a week. Mild painkillers will help with this but avoid taking aspirin.</p> <p>Keep walking around to avoid post operative complications.</p> <p>Sports bra worn day and night for about 3 weeks.</p> | <p>Might pull and hurt a little when you move around.</p> <p>Any non dissolvable stitches would be removed.</p> <p>Gradually begin to increase your activity.</p> <p>Depending on your job, should be able to return to work from 2 weeks.</p> <p>Drive only when you feel safe.</p> | <p>Avoid lifting or pushing anything heavy for at least four weeks.</p> <p>No need to wear a bra during the night but keep one on during the day.</p> <p>Loss of sensation to breast and nipple area continues to improve.</p> | <p>Scars will begin to soften and fade.</p> <p>Can start to judge the result.</p> |

In the first two days after your operation, it is important for you to be out of bed and walking every two hours during the day and early evening. Staying in bed too long increases your chances of developing clots in the legs. Gradually increase your activity over the next few days.

You may have some discomfort for about a week but mild painkillers will help with this. You may also experience random, shooting pains for a few months.

Depending on your job, you should be able to return to work 2 to 4 weeks after the operation.

You should avoid lifting or pushing anything heavy for at least four weeks.

Expect some loss of feeling in the nipples and surrounding skin. This should begin to improve over the next six weeks. However, for some people, return of sensation can take up to a year and occasionally may not return at all.

The scars can remain lumpy and red for a few months but then should begin to soften and fade.

During the first six weeks, care must be taken to avoid stretching the scars. Only moderate activity is advisable the first two weeks following surgery. After four weeks, you can increase your activity further. You may return to heavy, vigorous/high impact activity after six weeks. Up to this time, any vigorous exercise you do should exclude shoulder and arm movements.

Your surgeon will ask you not to drive until you are comfortable (usually one to two weeks).

Avoid sunbathing topless for up to a year after the operation and certainly for the first few months. The scars are more sensitive to sunlight and burn more easily.

Although you should notice a significant change in breast size straight away, it will be some weeks before you will be able to see the final shape of your breasts. They may feel tender and lumpy. It takes time for the post-operative swelling to go down. Do wait at least six weeks before you purchase your new bras.

## Tell us what you think?

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For up to date information on Nuffield Cosmetic Surgery please visit our website at [www.nuffieldcosmeticsurgery.com](http://www.nuffieldcosmeticsurgery.com)

This leaflet has been carefully reviewed by consultant plastic surgeons, consultant anaesthetists, members of the general public and patients who have undergone cosmetic procedures.

**DISCLAIMER:** This guide is provided for general information only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

We ensure that the content in this leaflet is reviewed regularly (at least annually).

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