

Breast Reduction (Reduction Mammoplasty)

The size of women's breasts may be determined by several factors, such as inherited genes, body weight and hormonal influences. They can, therefore, be a problem to some women early in adolescence or may not become uncomfortable until middle age following the menopause or the use of HRT. The problem of large breasts, however, may cause similar problems at all ages and these are chiefly backache, neck pain, grooves in the shoulders from bra straps, rashes under the breasts and the feeling of self-consciousness and embarrassment. Because of the sexual nature of breasts the undue prominence may attract unwanted attention from the opposite sex, comments and sexual innuendoes. These can cause psychological distress to many women. One of the commonest complaints of women with large breasts is that it is very difficult to wear fashionable clothes and indulge in active sports, particularly in the summer months.

What can be done?

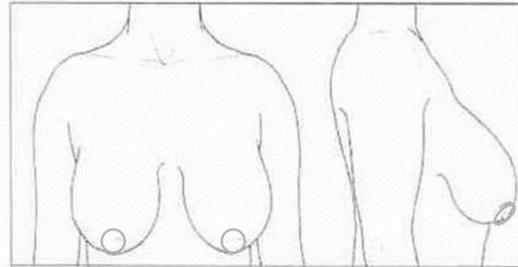
Reduction mammoplasty is an operation which removes the excess fat and skin from the breasts, which are re-shaped and the nipples repositioned to form smaller breasts. All of them will involve a scar around the areola of the breast but there will be vertical and perhaps horizontal scars as well. Different scars will have advantages and disadvantages and your surgeon may select, with your approval, the best technique in your particular case. Reduction mammoplasty may be used to correct asymmetry of the breast, where one breast is very much larger than the other. Sometimes, marginal volume difference can be improved by liposuction alone.

What are the consequences?

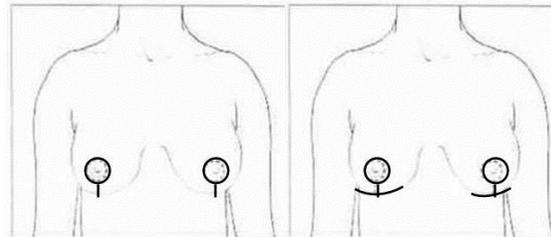
Apart from the change of shape and reduction in size the most obvious consequences are the scars. These are designed to be hidden whilst wearing normal clothing and as far as possible are designed to lie under the average bra or bikini top. Over the months following surgery the scars will fade from being red, possibly thick and uncomfortable, to becoming much more pale and less obvious. However, they will always be present and visible when clothing is not worn and the scars will vary from one woman to another. In some they may be very thin, in others they may stretch and become quite red and possibly ugly. In the vast majority of women, however, the scars are acceptable and a small trade off for the benefit of dealing with the problems of large breasts. Very few women are able to breast feed following breast reduction surgery, as some of the milk ducts are separated from the underlying glands and at the time of pregnancy the milk supply will gradually dry up, sometimes with the assistance of hor-

none treatment. Breast reduction is no contra indication to pregnancy but young women may well wish to take the fact that they are unable to breast feed into account before embarking on this procedure.

The nipples are likely to be very much less sensitive following surgery due to the nature of the cuts and the nerve supply and it is quite possible that numbness will extend over part of the breast as well. Sometimes the nipples become hyper-sensitive, if and when they recover sensation.



Before operation



Vertical Scar Reduction

Inverted T Scar

Will the improvement last?

Unless your operation is done at an age when your breasts are still growing, they should not regrow afterwards. They will, however, increase in size if you either put on weight or become pregnant and decrease in size if you lose weight. Even normal breasts have a tendency to droop with time and you can expect some change in shape to occur after a reduction mammoplasty. You can delay this tendency by supporting your breasts in well fitting bras. The heavier the remaining breast tissue, the more likely to drop at a later stage.

What are the limitations?

It is very important that you discuss thoroughly with your surgeon beforehand the size of breasts you wish to achieve. Many women wish for a very radical reduction but in order to achieve this the shape and aesthetic quality of the breasts may be compromised. It is also possible that there may be a degree of asymmetry. This is often less than existed before the surgery. In women with very large breasts the benefits of a significant reduction may outweigh the potential imperfections of poor shape and loss of nipple function and sensitivity. However, in women with breasts which are only slightly larger than normal very careful thought must be given to the scarring and the potential shape and size as the outcome of the surgery may not be as aesthetically pleasing as a normal breast appearance.

What are the risks?

Any major operation with a general anaesthetic carries a small risk of chest infection particularly among people who smoke and there is also a small risk of thrombosis in the veins of the leg, particularly for patients who are taking the contraceptive pill. Long haul flights in the post-op period should be delayed for at least six weeks.

Occasionally, bleeding can occur after the operation is finished. This may require surgical intervention. Infection from germs harbouring in the ducts of the breast can be troublesome. This can be treated with antibiotics but it will delay the healing process. Scars are likely to be worse to start with and there may be a need to re-stitch them at a later date. If you have a discharge from your nipple, it is most important to tell your surgeon about it before your operation.

Occasionally, skin can become sloughy and form a scab which gradually separates to leave a broad scar. The nipple disc and the skin where the scar meets underneath the breast are parts most likely to be affected. People who smoke are at greater risk of this happening. Usually the scars settle well to end up as white lines but they will always be noticeable. However, some people have an inborn tendency for scars to stretch and sometimes they can stay thick, red and irritable for a long time.

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