

Talking with Your Plastic Surgeon

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Breast reconstruction has really advanced in the past few years, and now there are more options than ever for women after their mastectomies. Keep in mind, your doctor should help you understand what's possible and help evaluate what's best for you based on your medical history, body type, breasts, and wishes.

And don't forget that your plastic surgeon should meet a few important pre-reqs, most importantly being board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgery. Keep your eyes peeled for these warning signs that a doctor might not be:

- Operates only in his or her office operating suite
- Only accepts cash and won't accept insurance for breast reconstruction

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH PATIENTS LIKE ME?

- Have you treated patients who are at high risk for developing breast cancer before?
- How many breast reconstructions after mastectomies do you perform each month? Each year? How many of these mastectomies are done prophylactically?
- Do you keep surveys about your patients' satisfaction rate? Can you provide references from former patients?
- What is your flap or implant failure rate?
- How many of your patients have to undergo revisions after their first surgery? (Revisions are additional surgeries that doctors perform to modify, correct or enhance the original results of the surgery to ensure patient satisfaction.)

WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND FOR ME?

- Could you explain the different techniques for breast reconstruction? What are the pros and cons for each of them?
- Are there any new reconstruction options I should know about?
- Do you specialize in a particular method? Why do you prefer it?
- How do I know if implants or a flap surgery (using my own tissue) is best for me? What's the difference in recovery, appearance and safety?
- What kinds of reconstruction are possible for me? Which would you recommend? Why?
- If I choose not to keep my nipple, do you perform nipple reconstruction? If you recommend areola tattooing, who is your tattoo artist?

TELL ME MORE ABOUT RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

- What general surgeons or breast surgeons do you work with for these procedures?
- Will you perform all of the surgery, or do you allow medical students to step in?
- What is the percentage of infection in the first year?
- Are there any possible complications I should know about?
- How long will the procedure take? Can you tell me about it, step by step?
- What type of anesthesia will I have? What are its risks?

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER THE SURGERY?

- How much discomfort or pain do women typically feel?
- Will I have sensation in my reconstructed breast(s)?
- What will I look like? Can I see before-and-after pictures of your previous patients?
- How long will my hospital stay and recovery time be? When can I return to my normal activities? Driving? Work? Lifting weights? Running? Sex?
- Will I have drains? Stitches?
- What can I do to minimizing scarring?
- What are my options if I'm unhappy with the results? Do you perform revisions? What type of revisions have you done?
- What else should I know about how I will look and feel? Physically? Emotionally?

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INSURANCE & SCHEDULING?

- How much will this procedure cost me? Can you break down the costs (breast surgeon, plastic surgeon, anesthesia and hospital stay)?
- Will my insurance cover it, and will you help me with filing a claim? If my provider denies coverage, would you be willing to help me appeal it? (See sidebar for more key info on this topic.)
- How far out do you schedule surgeries? What sort of preparation will I need to do the weeks or days before the surgery?
- Where will the procedure be done? How long will I be in the hospital?
- Will I have any follow-up appointments with you after the surgery? How often?
- For how long? What can I expect during those appointments?

NOTES

This guide was authored in collaboration with Dina Roth Port, author of the book *Previvors: Facing the Breast Cancer Gene and Making Life-Changing Decisions*.

BRIGHT PINK is a national non-profit on a mission to save women's lives from breast and ovarian cancer by empowering them to live proactively at a young age. For more information or to get involved, visit BrightPink.org.