



Whether you're considering a lift, reduction, augmentation or reconstruction, deciding on surgery is only the first step. Adjusting to your new breasts takes a little work (and some shopping, too!)

BY KATHRYN BAILEY

# Breast-laid plans

Although breast cancer surgery will eventually result in bigger, smaller, perkier or healthier breasts, the effects aren't instant. "Your new shape will evolve throughout the healing process," says Tamara Glick, owner of Trademark Image Consulting in Toronto. "The compression garments you wear post-surgery will affect the way your clothes fall. Ultimately, the shape of your new body will mean the dressing strategies you used before will need to be revised." A new shape doesn't just necessitate changes to your wardrobe: you'll also need time to adjust, physically and mentally, to the change in your silhouette. ►

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## Physical Recovery

Immediate concerns after breast surgery revolve around the healing process: "Initially, you'll have wound care, be wearing a support bra, and have restrictions placed on your activity for the first week post-op. Then comes a gradual return to normal activities and exercise," says Dr. Robert Patterson, MD, FRCSC, FACS, a plastic surgeon in Hamilton, Ont. "Pain is usually not a prominent complaint for most patients, but it is for some," he says.

Post-op complications specific to breast surgeries include: altered sensation, interference with breastfeeding (following reduction surgery), interference with mammograms (following augmentation surgery), capsular contracture, secondary changes in shape (from aging, pregnancies, weight gain/loss, etcetera), implant rippling and, with saline implants, deflation. Leakage can also occur, though rupture rates are fairly low. "Some patients enjoy 30 years without replacement," says Dr. Patterson. "Though all women should expect to replace their implants – or have them removed and not replaced at some time, most likely in the 10 to 20 year range."

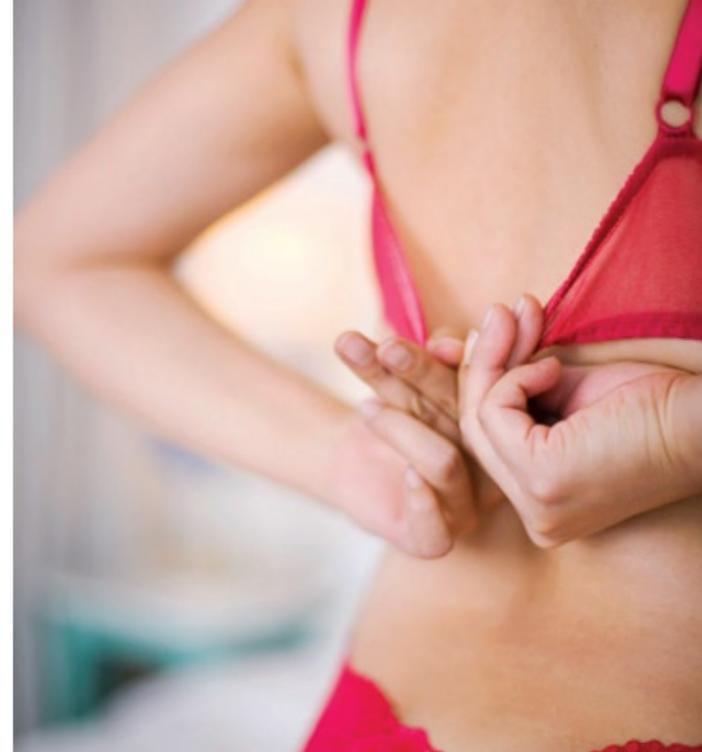
## Emotional Recovery

Some women develop confusion after breast surgery when they realize it hasn't solved all of their problems or they don't appear exactly as they'd imagined.

"While some women may be able to see and appreciate their new shape or size immediately, swelling can distort or camouflage the results, often leading to confusion, anxiety and sometimes anger or depression," says Dr. Patterson. "Sometimes women experience guilt: Should they have done it? Are their breasts too large? And sometimes women experience depression similar to postpartum depression: they can be very happy about their appearance and yet feel a loss, particularly after a reduction." These issues are often temporary and are usually resolved within a year after surgery.

The emotional response to a "new body" can be more complicated when a partner or spouse is involved. "Relationship difficulties usually won't be mended by breast surgery," says Dr. Patterson. Though "it certainly may enhance healthy relationships and is often very important for women suffering a loss (divorce or death of a spouse) in order to feel self-confident and attractive." In a relationship, couples should cultivate intimacy on a number of levels beyond the physical. "If you are loved only because you have a beautiful and perfect body, that is certainly going to be more threatening than if there is a sense of being loved for who you are," says Ingrid Drescher, RN, a psychotherapist and couples counsellor in Toronto. "Intimacy is cultivated not just sexually, but with cuddling and emotional intimacy. If a friendship is involved, that helps, too."

"You may find that having a close friend or family member who supports your decision act as your primary support is helpful as you move through the healing process," says Glick. "Keep positive, supportive friends and family close by through the ups and downs...to help you focus on the positive changes you made for yourself."



## Wardrobe Recovery

Intertwined with the larger emotional and physical issues following breast surgery is outward appearance. The first step toward reinforcing positive self-image, following the surgeon's approval, is to have a bra fitting. "Getting the right support for your new body is crucial to maintaining your confidence and your image both in and out of your clothes," says Glick. "As swelling may continue for a number of months, I would suggest having a bra fitting every couple of months during the first eight to 12 months post-surgery to see whether your lingerie choices need adjustments."

Once fitted for a bra, most women look forward to discovering new clothing possibilities. While exciting, this may seem overwhelming. "It's a huge adjustment because women are buying a new wardrobe...nothing fits them anymore," says Kelly Millar, fashion/image consultant and founder of Kelly Millar Image Consulting in Toronto. "It's essentially a new body and they're used to thinking of themselves as either small-breasted or large-breasted."

## Shape shifting tips:

**Small-breasted women:** wear more plunging necklines like scoop, V-necks or cowl necks; anything that has detail in pockets, ruffling or patterns; wrap-tops can also be breast-enhancing.

**Larger-breasted women:** stay more clean and solid; avoid details or pockets; avoid cowl necks or anything that rests on the breast area; avoid crew necks, turtlenecks or anything tight around the neck. "You want to try to balance the body," Millar says. "I always recommend going with more clean lines and fabrics that skim the body rather than cling."

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