

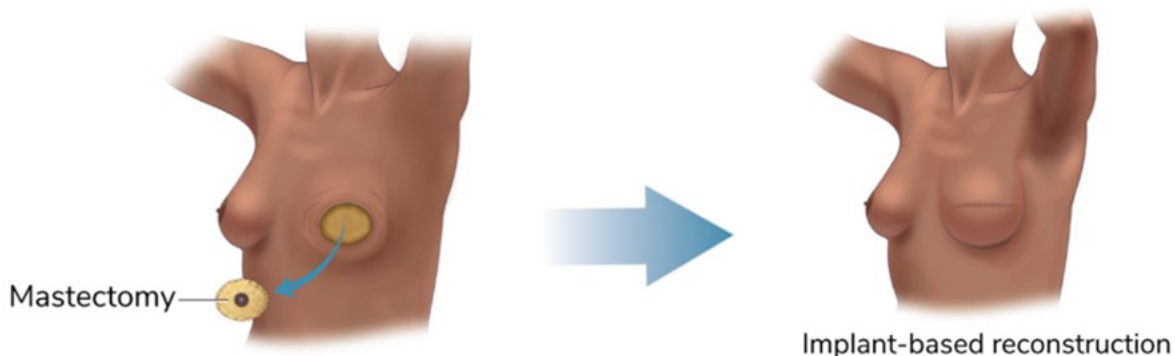
Breast Reconstruction with Tissue Expanders/Implants

The goal of reconstruction is to make breasts look natural and balanced in a bra or under clothes. You and your surgeon will choose the best option and size of your reconstructed breast based on your preferences, how healthy your skin is, and how you heal. The shape and size of your breasts before surgery will determine the final shape of your reconstructed breasts. Reconstruction with tissue expanders/implant cannot create an exact copy of your removed breasts. This surgery can be done at the same time as your mastectomy (immediate reconstruction) or weeks, months or years after your cancer treatment (delayed reconstruction).

Breast reconstruction with tissue expansion and implants may be a 1 or 2-step process. Your doctor will talk with you about what option is best for you.

- **Direct to Implant Surgery (1 step)**

If enough skin can be saved to maintain the size of breast you want, an implant can be inserted at the same time as your mastectomy. A breast implant is a soft capsule filled with a jelly-like substance or salt water, that can be put under or over the chest muscle to create a breast shape. Direct to implant surgery is not always an option.



This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

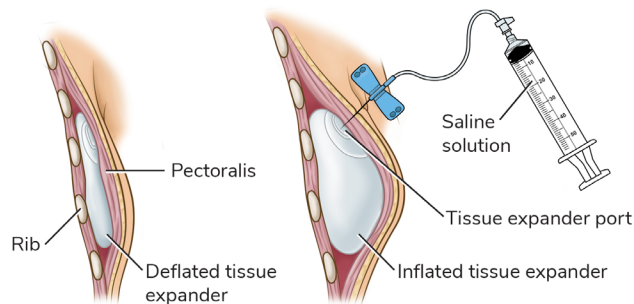
- **Tissue Expanders, then breast/chest implant placement (2 step)**

During the first step of this surgery, a silicone balloon-like device, called a tissue expander is put under your skin and attached to your chest wall. Your tissue expander will be filled with sterile salt water (saline) over time, at frequent (probably weekly) visits with a nurse. To fill your expander, the nurse will use a magnet to find the port that is on your expander under your skin. When the port is found, the nurse will clean your skin and then put a needle attached to a syringe filled with saline into the port. The nurse will then inject the saline into the port to enlarge the tissue expander. In order to avoid stretching the skin too quickly, a small amount of saline is used each time until it is the desired size.

It may take 1 to 3 months to fill your tissue expander to the size that is right for you. Once the expansion is done, the filled expander is left in place for 2 to 3 months. This lets the tissues become permanently stretched and makes the pocket where your breast implant will be placed. Then a second surgery is done to remove the tissue expander and replace it with a breast implant.

Subpectoral Implant

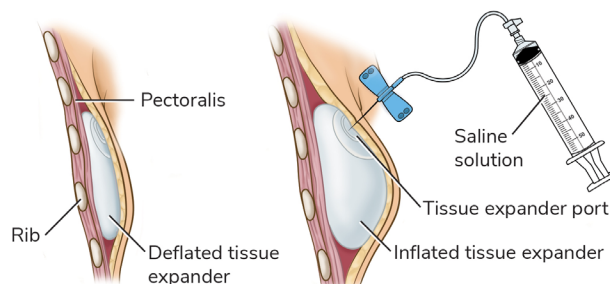
(implant placed under the pectoralis major muscle)



Implant after expander removed

Prepectoral Implant

(implant placed over the pectoralis major muscle)



Implant after expander removed

How long will the surgery take?

The surgery to place an implant or tissue expander usually takes 1 to 2 hours. If it is done together with a mastectomy, the total surgery time is about 3 to 6 hours.

When tissue expanders are used, you will need to have a second 2 to 3 hour surgery to remove the expander and replace it with a breast implant. If you have a tissue expander on one side only, surgery can be done on the other breast at the same time to give you better symmetry.

How long will I be in the hospital?

You will stay in the hospital overnight after your mastectomy surgery, having an implant or tissue expander placed at the same time will not extend your stay.

The surgery to remove your tissue expander and replace it with a permanent implant is normally done as an outpatient procedure and you will go home the same day.

Where will my scar be?

Your plastic surgeon will use the same incision (cut) used for your mastectomy. You may also have scars where drains were placed.

What are the benefits of this type of surgery?

Since your mastectomy incision (cut) is used again to put in the tissue expander and implant, there are no other scars on your body. When compared to the other types of breast reconstruction, this one has the shortest surgery time and the shortest recovery time.

What are the risks?

The most common risks with breast reconstruction with tissue expanders and implants include:

- **Short-term risks**
 - ▶ **Infection** - If your surgical site becomes infected, surgery may be needed to remove the implant. If this happens, the breast reconstruction process may start again after you have healed from the surgery.
 - ▶ **Fluid build-up (seroma)**
 - ▶ **Bleeding (hematoma)** – This may require surgery to clear out any bleeding.
 - ▶ **Slow healing** - this can lead to a wound and increase your risk of infection.
- **Long-term risks**
 - ▶ **Capsular contracture** - scar tissue that tightens around the implant and causes the breast to change shape and become hard.
 - ▶ **Asymmetry** - the size, shape or level of your breasts look uneven.
 - ▶ **Malposition** - the breast implant is not in the correct position.
 - ▶ **Breast Implant-Associated Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma (ALCL)** - a rare type of cancer that can happen with breast implants.

What type of support will I need at home?

- You will need to have a family member or friend drive you home after your surgery and hospital stay. They should stay with you at least 24 hours after you are home to make sure you are recovering well.
- After your surgery, you will not be able to lift, push or pull anything over 5 pounds. You will need help doing laundry, cooking and other housework. You will have to limit your activity and avoid formal exercise, except walking, for 6 weeks.
- You will not be able to drive while taking opioid pain medicines. Depending on the surgery you had, you should discuss when you will be safe to drive with your surgeon.
- Air travel and long car trips should be avoided for at least 30 days. If you must travel, walk for a few minutes every hour.

Follow - up

- You will follow-up with your surgical team often for the first few weeks after surgery. Once you have finished the reconstruction process, you will need to follow up every 2 years to check your implants.