

Breast Reduction: A decision guide

Breast reduction can relieve pain, make it easier to exercise, and help you feel more confident. Talk to your surgeon about your options as well as the benefits and risks of this surgery.

What is breast reduction, and why would I choose it?

Breast reduction surgery, also called reduction mammoplasty [MAM-uh-plas-tee], is a surgery that makes large breasts smaller. For some women, breast reduction may help with back or neck pain, headaches, spine problems, skin irritation, or rashes. Others may choose breast reduction because of discomfort while exercising, bra strap indents on their shoulders, or feeling self-conscious about one's breast size or about unwanted attention.

What can I expect?

Here are some common questions about breast reduction:

- **What size and shape will my breasts be?**
In addition to making your breasts smaller to relieve pain or other problems, your surgeon can also reshape the breasts so they are higher. The size and shape of your breasts may be different than what you imagine, often due to other factors such as birth control, weight changes, pregnancy, or menopause. Be sure to talk with your surgeon about what size you want your breasts to be.
- **Will both breasts be exactly the same size?**
No two breasts are exactly the same size—this is normal. But if your breasts are quite different in size, the surgeon will try to make them more equal.
- **What will my nipples and areolas [uh-ree-OWE-luhz] look like?** In most cases, the nipples and areolas (the dark areas around your nipples) will be moved higher on the breast. Your surgeon may also be able to make your areolas smaller during the surgery, if appropriate.

What do I need to do next?

- Review the benefits, risks, and other considerations for having breast reduction surgery provided in this handout.
 - Use the “Decisions Factors” box on [page 4](#) to note what's important to you about making this decision.
 - Review what you selected on [page 4](#) with your family and your doctor.
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- **Will I have scars?** You will have scars, but for most women they fade to light lines. With the most common method used, scars are hidden in the crease under your breasts or at the edge of the areola. Ask your surgeon where your scars will be.
 - **Will the surgery affect the feeling in my breasts?** Most women have some changes in sensitivity after the surgery—often numbness, but in some cases they are extra sensitive. Feeling may return to normal over weeks or months, but some degree of change may be permanent. If breast sensitivity is very important to you, tell your surgeon.
 - **Will my insurance cover the surgery?** You will need to talk with your surgeon and insurance company about whether or not your breast reduction surgery will be covered. In some cases, when the goal of breast reduction surgery is to address significant pain or other medical problems, insurance plans may cover the surgery.
 - **Will I still be able to breastfeed?** Because some milk glands or ducts are often removed during the surgery, you may be unable to breastfeed in the future. Tell your surgeon if the ability to breastfeed is important to you.

What happens if I have the surgery?

Breast reduction surgery usually takes several hours. In general, here's what to expect.

Before the surgery

At your consultation, you'll meet with the surgeon. You'll discuss your goals for the surgery, the surgery plan, and answer your questions. You'll also have a physical exam and talk about your health history. Bring a list of all of the medications you are taking, including prescriptions, birth control medicines, over-the-counter medicines (such as allergy pills or cough syrup), inhalers, patches, vitamin supplements, or herbal remedies.

Arrange for someone to come with you to the hospital and to help care for you during the first 24 hours after you go home.

During the surgery

The day of surgery, the surgeon will mark each breast, based on your surgery plan and approach (see methods at right). You will have general anesthesia (medicine that puts you into a deep sleep).

The surgeon will make incisions along the markings and remove extra fat, breast tissue, and skin. The surgeon will move the nipple and areola so they are higher on the breast. The rest of the skin will then be brought in around the areola to form a smaller breast.

At the end of the surgery, the surgeon may place a soft tube in each breast to drain fluids. The incisions will be closed with stitches or surgical tape. Your breasts will be wrapped in gauze, and you'll have an elastic bandage wrapped around your chest.

After the surgery

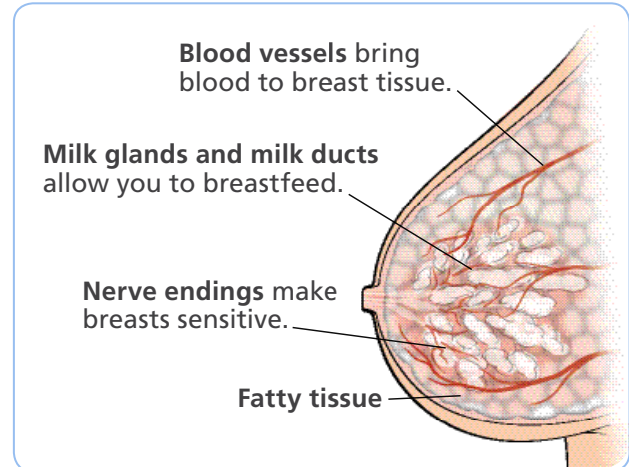
You'll spend time in recovery until you're ready to go home, or you'll stay overnight. Someone will need to drive you home and stay with you for the first 24 hours.

You'll need to stay home and rest for a week or two. You'll have pain medicine, and you may need to take antibiotics. If you have tubes to drain fluid from your breasts, they will be removed in 1 or 2 days.

Your scars will be most prominent around 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. But within 6 months or so, they usually fade to light lines. Your breasts will also settle into their final size and shape.

Breast reduction surgery

During breast reduction surgery, the surgeon removes mostly fatty tissue, but the surgery can also affect milk ducts and nerve endings.

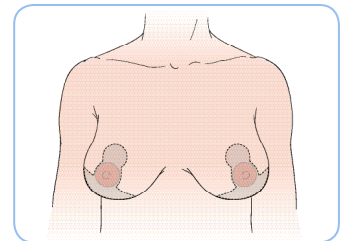


Surgery methods

Ask your surgeon about the surgery type recommended for your situation. **Two common methods** are "keyhole" (or "inverted T" method) or the free nipple graft.

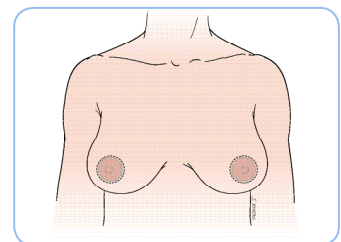
Keyhole or inverted T method

The nipple and areola stay connected to breast tissue, blood vessels, and nerves during the surgery. This method is less likely to disrupt breast sensation, and many women can still breastfeed afterward. Scars will be around the areola and in the crease beneath your breast.



Free nipple graft

Sometimes, it may be necessary to remove the nipple and areola temporarily during the surgery. Afterward, you will neither have any feeling in your nipples nor be able to breastfeed. You will have scars around the areola.



What are the risks of the surgery?

Every surgery has some risks, including breast reduction surgery. Major complications from breast reduction surgery are rare, but it's important to know the risks as part of your decision. If you have any questions about the risks of surgery, please ask. Your surgeon will be happy to discuss them.

If you are in poor health, the risks of surgery can be higher. If you have a serious medical condition, you should get a medical release from your regular doctor before you have breast reduction surgery. Be sure to let your surgeon know if you have ever had an allergic reaction to any medication, latex, or other substances or if you have had problems when you've had anesthesia in the past.

Potential benefits	Risks and potential complications	Alternatives
<p>Relief from problems caused by having large breasts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back pain, neck pain, or headaches • Spine problems • Skin irritation or rashes • Discomfort while exercising • Bra strap indents on your shoulders • Self-consciousness about breast size or unwanted attention 	<p>Risks that can happen with any surgery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection. Your medical team will work to prevent infection, but in some cases an infection can develop after surgery. If this happens, you will be treated with antibiotics. • Blood clots. There's a small risk that blood clots may form in one or both legs. In very rare cases, a clot can travel to the heart or lungs and cause serious problems. • An allergic reaction to anesthesia or medications. Some allergic reactions can be dangerous, even deadly. Your medical team is trained to respond to any allergic reaction. • Bleeding after surgery. In some cases, you will start bleeding after surgery. In rare cases you may need an operation to stop the bleeding. <p>Risks that can happen with any breast surgery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different results than you expected, including continuing back or neck pain from other causes or breast size and shape differences. • Changes in breast feeling or function, including numbness or increased sensitivity in nipples or breasts. • Inability to breastfeed • Healing problems, including scars that don't heal well or wounds that reopen (uncommon). • Skin around the scars that blackens or becomes blistered, a rare problem that occurs more often among smokers or those with an infection and may be treated with surgery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises to strengthen your stomach or back muscles • Weight loss to reduce your breast size • A support bra with padded straps • Ointments or creams for skin problems

Notes

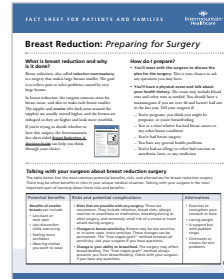
How do I decide?

If you're unsure about whether or not to have breast reduction, try these suggestions:

- **Make a list of the goals that are most important to you.** Use the decision factors section below to weigh your reasons to choose or not choose the surgery.
- **Talk with your surgeon.** Ask about the plan for the surgery, your options, and any factors that concern you.
- **Talk with people who love and support you.** People who know you well can help you think through your decision.
- **Talk to others who have made this decision.** Hearing their experience may be helpful.

Where can I learn more?

If you decide to have breast reduction surgery, ask your care provider for copies of these helpful Intermountain patient education materials:



Breast Reduction: Preparing for surgery



Breast Reduction: Recovering at home

Decision factors

Check all the boxes below that apply to you. For each item you checked, put numbers in the Importance column to mark the factors that are most important to you. Comparing the left and right sides may help you choose.

Reasons to choose the surgery	Importance
<input type="checkbox"/> You have back pain, neck pain, or frequent headaches caused by the weight of large breasts.	
<input type="checkbox"/> You have grooves on your shoulders from your bra straps, and this bothers you.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Your breast size causes rashes or other skin problems.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Your breast size makes it hard to exercise or be as active as you would like.	
<input type="checkbox"/> You are self-conscious about your breasts or you face unwanted attention.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Your breast size keeps you from wearing the clothes you would like.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons:	

Reasons not to choose the surgery	Importance
<input type="checkbox"/> You're worried about the risks of the surgery. (See page 3 for details on surgery risks.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> You don't want scars. (Scars usually fade, but this isn't guaranteed. They are usually placed so they can be hidden.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Breast sensitivity is important to you, and you don't want this to change.	
<input type="checkbox"/> It's important for you to be able to breastfeed. (Many women can breastfeed after breast reduction surgery, but this isn't guaranteed.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> I'm worried that my insurance might not cover this surgery.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other reasons:	

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