

Non-Surgical Options

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Introduction

Many women do not undergo a breast reconstruction because:

- they are not aware that it is available
- they feel comfortable living with only one breast
- they do not want to have more surgery
- their partners or families do not think reconstruction is necessary
- there is no plastic surgeon who performs breast reconstruction in their community

If a woman chooses not to have a breast reconstruction, she can either:

- live without any breast replacement
- wear a prosthesis (i.e. a false breast)

No Breast Replacement

Some women may choose not to have their breast reconstructed and they do not want to wear a breast prosthesis either. In this case, the side of the chest with the mastectomy remains flat and the bra cup remains empty.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of living without any replacement of the breast.

Advantages of No Replacement

Wearing no replacement may be:

- simpler

- more convenient
- more comfortable

Disadvantages of No Replacement

- some women may feel unbalanced with only one breast
- it may be harder to wear some kinds of clothes (e.g. a bathing suit) with only one breast
- it may be harder to keep your posture straight because of the imbalance

Breast Prostheses

A prosthesis is a synthetic breast form that you can use under your clothing to recreate the breast. Some women may choose to use a prosthesis until they have had a breast reconstruction, while others may use a prosthesis permanently.

Advantages of Prostheses

- prostheses may produce a more natural shape under clothes
- prostheses may produce a more "balanced" look
- prostheses do not require any additional surgery
- if the patient's natural breast size changes (e.g. with changes in weight), they can adjust the size of their prosthesis

Disadvantages of Prostheses

- some women may be less comfortable in revealing clothes (e.g. in a bathing suit) as compared to if they had reconstructive surgery
- a prosthesis may be heavy, feel hot, and move around inside the bra
- some prostheses require that the patient wears a special bra so that the prosthesis doesn't fall out (or buy a model with adhesive)
- it may be less convenient to do certain things (e.g. playing active sports) with the prosthesis in place
- prostheses do not change size with changes in weight (although you can buy a new prosthesis to match the change in size of your natural breast)

The prosthesis is held in place by a variety of methods. There are special bras, lingerie and bathing suits that are specifically designed for breast cancer survivors. This clothing comes with a pocket to hold the prosthesis, or you can have pockets sewn into the suits or bras you already own. This helps keep the prosthesis from popping out during swimming or other physical activities. Some products also come with adhesive Velcro patches to attach the prosthesis directly to the upper part of your chest. This can allow the patient to go bra-less or wear their own regular bras. Many active women and athletes choose this model. The adhesive lasts from three to five days and the prosthesis can even be worn while swimming or in the shower.

Types of Prostheses

There are many shapes, sizes and materials used for prostheses. The ideal product has the shape, weight, motion, and balance of your natural opposite breast. There are two main types: a

lightweight style made of polyfill or foam and a natural-weight style made of silicone.

The lightweight style is usually worn in the initial post-recovery period. It can also be used later during warm weather activities or during specific times when less weight may be desirable. This type is machine washable.

The second type is made of silicone. Most women prefer this style, because it is more lifelike. Two shapes are available: asymmetrical (i.e. one for the left side and one for the right side) and symmetrical. The advantage of this model is that silicone is closer to the consistency and weight of a natural breast. However, silicone products need to be hand washed.

Where do patients get a prostheses?

Prostheses can be purchased at some surgical supply stores, pharmacies, and/or custom lingerie clothing shops.

Patients can also contact the Breast Cancer Society of Canada for more information on where to purchase breast prostheses in their area. They can be reached toll free at 1-800-567-8767 or visit their web site (<http://www.bcsc.ca>).

For patients in the Toronto area, an excellent resource can be found at Shopper's Home Health Care in the Marvella Koffler Breast Centre, which is on the 12th floor at Mount Sinai Hospital. The phone number is 416-586-8709.

Who pays for the prosthesis?

The cost of a prosthesis generally ranges between \$300 and \$400 (CDN).

However, with a note from their physician, some of this cost will be covered by the Ontario Assistive Devices program (generally between \$180 and \$220 will be covered). The remainder is either covered by the patient's personal insurance plan or is paid "out-of-pocket" by the patients themselves.