

# Breast reconstruction



In conjunction with the resource “Guide for women with early breast cancer” (NBOCC, 2008), this fact sheet will provide you with some added information about:

- Where to access reliable advice.
- Breast reconstruction following breast conserving surgery.
- Possible problems that may occur post reconstruction surgery.

## Where to access reliable advice:

Breast reconstruction is a specialised form of surgery. There are different opinions about the best time for reconstruction and the timing may depend on the type of breast cancer you had and whether you need further treatment. Your own breast surgeon may have the expertise to perform a reconstruction, or you may be referred to a plastic surgeon. If you are seeking advice from a plastic surgeon, ask to be referred to a plastic surgeon who is an expert in reconstruction and is a fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, and a member of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons. Sometimes it is helpful to get a second opinion from another breast surgeon or plastic surgeon.

You may also find it helpful to talk to a woman who has already had a breast reconstruction. Cancer Council Queensland may be able to put you in touch with a woman who has undergone a breast reconstruction of the same type you are considering. Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20) or a breast care nurse or counsellor at your treating hospital or

local community health centre may also be able to help you with advice and to reflect on any issues you may have.

## Breast reconstruction following breast conserving surgery:

Along with the different types of breast reconstruction outlined in the “Guide for woman with early breast cancer” (NBOCC, 2008), there is also an option for reconstruction following conservative surgery. For many women, conservative surgery may only subtly affect symmetry. However some women will have a distortion of their breast shape or asymmetry and this will be to such an extent that these women may wish to consider reconstruction to obtain symmetry. This may involve techniques such as breast reduction or flap reconstruction. We encourage you to discuss this with your surgeon if you have any concerns or questions.

## Possible problems that may occur post reconstruction surgery:

As with all operations, recovery will take longer if problems occur. The main operation for a breast reconstruction requires you to spend between two to ten days in hospital. If problems occur this may be related to the anaesthetic, to infection, or wound healing. Some women who have had a flap method reconstruction also experience muscle weakness. This may involve weakness in bending at the middle, or perhaps when getting up from a low chair. Other concerns may involve tissue loss, where reconstruction involves your own tissue (skin and fat) being transferred to the breast and can be complicated by poor flow, partial or complete loss of tissue. With the use of implants for

your reconstruction there is a chance that fibrous tissue (scar tissue) will form around it. If this becomes thick over time the breast may become firm; this condition is called capsular contracture. Implant rupture is also a complication that may develop at some stage. This may be due to unusual pressure on the implant, for example an accidental blow to the breast. This is usually surgically repaired as a day outpatient or overnight stay.

**All people heal differently and the final appearance of a scar will vary from person to person, even if the surgery is the same. Most scars heal slowly over time. Discussing possible problems with your surgeon may help you prepare arrangements for work, home help or childcare.**

Breast reconstruction can be a challenging and emotional time. Cancer Council Queensland offers professional and confidential telephone support and written information to all Queenslanders affected by cancer. For further cancer information and support call Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 from Monday to Friday, 8am - 6pm.

Over the page is a list of websites that may provide further reliable information and support for you and your family.

## References:

- Breast prostheses and bra fittings, after breast cancer, CCQ, 2008 (out of print).
- Clinical practice guidelines (various), NBOCC.
- Guide for women with early breast cancer, NBOCC, 2008.



# Breast prosthesis and bra fittings



Obtaining a breast prosthesis can be an important part of a woman's recovery after surgery for breast cancer. In conjunction with the other resources provided, this fact sheet will provide information that may help you in the early period after surgery, through to the purchasing and fitting of a permanent prosthesis.

You can usually be fitted for a permanent prosthesis about six to eight weeks after surgery. In the initial recovery period, a temporary prosthesis can be worn, which Cancer Council Helpline are happy to supply to you when you call 13 11 20 from Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm.

It is beneficial for all women to utilise the services of corsetieres who are specifically trained to do fittings of bras and prostheses following breast surgery. This helps to ensure you are fitted with the prosthesis that best suits you and your lifestyle. To access a list of retail outlets closest to your area please call Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

In the resource, "Guide for women with early breast cancer" produced by the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre (2008), you will find details of the Australian Government Health Reimbursement Program which outlines your entitlement for a new or replacement external breast prosthesis. We encourage you to contact Medicare to receive further information about this program on 13 20 11, visit [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au) or visit any Medicare office in your local area.

For more information about cancer of the breast, treatment and support, contact your treating health professional or Cancer Council Queensland.

Useful websites and helpline details are provided on this page.

[www.nbocc.org.au](http://www.nbocc.org.au)

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre

[www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)

Cancer Council Australia

[www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au)

Cancer Council Queensland

[www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au)

Breast Cancer Network Australia

[www.cancervoicesaustralia.org.au](http://www.cancervoicesaustralia.org.au)

Cancer Voices Australia

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American Cancer Society

[www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org)

Breast cancer.org

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Macmillan Cancer Support

[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

Breast Cancer Care

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

National Cancer Institute

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