

You'll probably have many unanswered questions as you prepare for mastectomy with or without breast reconstruction. Your surgeons will be able to answer many of these, but to make the most effective use of your limited appointment time, it's best to first do your own research. FORCE's website: FacingOurRisk.org and [The Breast Reconstruction Guidebook](#) can help you learn about different procedures, what to expect and answers to the questions listed below.

*If you decide to have surgery, please review **FORCE's Mastectomy Surgery Checklist** to learn about suggestions to make you more comfortable with your experience. Below are a list of questions to guide you in your research.*

Questions to ask breast and plastic surgeons:

- How long will the surgery take and how long will I stay in the hospital?
- What is the overall reconstructive timeline, from initial surgery to complete recovery?
- How much discomfort or pain will I feel? How long will the pain last and how can I best manage it?
- How many surgical drains will I have and for how long? How much help will I need at home to take care of my drain(s) and wound(s)?
- What follow-up procedures will I need and when?
- What should I expect from recovery? What will my limitations be and what precautions should I take as I recover? When can I expect to return to my normal routine and activities, like driving, working, swimming or lifting my children?
- Will I have exercises to do to aid in my recovery? If so, what are the exercises and when should I start them?
- Will you provide instructions for scar management and desensitization?
- I'm a smoker. How will that impact my surgery and recovery?

Questions to ask your breast surgeon about mastectomy:

- What type of mastectomy will I have? What are the associated risks?
- Are you experienced with nipple-sparing mastectomy? If so, am I a candidate? What are the risks involved in keeping them? Will they have sensation or be flat if I choose to keep them? Is a pathological assessment of the tissue at the base of the nipple performed during surgery?
- [If you have breast cancer]: What factors should I consider when deciding between lumpectomy and radiation or mastectomy?
- [If a general surgeon will perform your mastectomy]: How frequently do you perform this type of mastectomy?
- How will my chest look? How much and where will I have sensation?
- Will you remove any of my lymph nodes? How many?
- [If you don't have breast cancer]: If so, why? Am I a candidate for sentinel lymph node biopsy?
- [If you have breast cancer]: If so, am I a candidate for sentinel lymph node biopsy?
- Will I be at risk for lymphedema (arm swelling) after surgery? Will I be educated on symptoms, treatment and long-term precautions?
- Will I need post-operative physical or occupational therapy for shoulder strength and range-of-motion?
- Will range-of-motion of my arm on the side of the mastectomy be temporarily limited? To what extent and for how long?
- Which reconstructive surgeons do you work with regularly and recommend?
- How may I obtain a copy of my pathology report?



Questions to ask your plastic surgeon regarding reconstruction:

- Which reconstruction procedures are you most experienced in? (Not all plastic surgeons perform all types of reconstruction.) How frequently do you perform these procedures?
- [If you have breast cancer]: Will chemotherapy or radiation therapy delay or affect my reconstruction?
- What results are realistic for me?
- May I see your patient photos of similar reconstructions?
- Are there any other reconstruction options that I should know about?
- Will I need a blood transfusion? Should I donate my own blood before surgery?
- What reconstructive procedure would be best for me? What are the risks associated with this procedure?
- How will my breasts look after surgery if I choose reconstruction? I'd like to be a [] cup size. Is that possible?
- How much sensation will I have in my reconstructed breasts? How will they feel to the touch?
- What problems, cosmetic and otherwise, might occur? How will you approach them?
- Should I expect follow-up/revision procedures?
- How many and what kind?
- If I don't have immediate reconstruction, can I have reconstruction in the future?
- What kinds of changes to the reconstructed breast can I expect over time?
- How will aging affect my reconstructed breast(s)?
- Who will tattoo my nipples and areolas? May I see photos of their work? How long can I expect the tattooing to last?
- Which breast surgeons do you work with regularly and recommend?
- Will I need a special bra after surgery? If so, will you provide it? Does my health insurance cover the cost?
- Do I have any health issues—obesity, diabetes, heart disease, etc.—that might delay or impact my ability to have reconstruction?
- [If you travel for your reconstruction]: How will I handle any post-op problems that occur?

Toll-free Helpline: 866-288-RISK (7475)

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For women choosing no reconstruction:

- Do I need a plastic surgeon if I choose no reconstruction?
- How will you make sure that the mastectomy scars lay flat against my chest?
- What method will the plastic surgeon do to complete the surgery?
- What will the incisions look like?
- Will the stitches dissolve or have to be removed?
- Can I have nipples made? If so, when is that done, how is that done and where is that done?
- How long after the nipples are made (or if no nipples are made) can the tattooing be done? Is tattooing painful?

For women choosing implant reconstruction:

- Will I need tissue expanders or am I a candidate for direct-to-implant? How frequently do you perform these procedures?
- Do you recommend saline or silicone implants? Why? May I see and hold samples of both types of implant options?
- Will I have round or teardrop implants? Why? What profile (projection) is best for me? Why?
- Will the implants be placed above or below my muscle(s)? Will you use an acellular dermal matrix with either positioning?
- How many surgeries will be required?
- How long can I expect the implants to last?
- What problems, including rupturing and leaking, might occur with implants?
- Do I need to be concerned about infection as long as I have implants?
- Do you provide warranty information for the implants I will have?

For women choosing flap reconstruction:

- How experienced are you with the flap reconstruction you recommended for me? How frequently do you perform it?
- Will you remove any muscle? If so, how much? Are there other procedures that spare the muscle?
- [If you have muscle removed from your back]: Will I need post-operative physical or occupational therapy for strength, flexibility and range-of-motion?
- How many surgeries will be required?
- What are the differences in risks and long-term quality between implants and flap reconstruction?
- How will future weight fluctuations affect my reconstructed breast(s)?
- Do I need to make any lifestyle changes to prepare for flap reconstruction?