

Lumpectomy vs Mastectomy

The Practical (and Emotional) Aspects of This Critical Milestone

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Surgery is an integral part of breast cancer treatment. With any surgery, it is helpful to prepare for your practical needs postsurgery. But unlike other types of surgery, breast surgery can carry a higher level of emotional implications for women. While there are practical things you can do to prepare and make the days following your surgery a bit easier, it's also important to acknowledge your feelings about the surgery and consider healthy ways to cope with the emotional impact.

To start, let's talk about the 2 types of surgery for breast cancer: lumpectomy and mastectomy.

DEPENDING ON THE SIZE OF THE LUMPECTOMY, THERE MAY BE SLIGHT CHANGES IN THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE BREAST.

LUMPECTOMY

Lumpectomy, also known as a partial mastectomy or breast-conserving surgery, refers to the removal of the tumor (or "lump") only. If you undergo a lumpectomy, you will likely be able to go home from the hospital the same day as the procedure, unless you have medical concerns that require additional monitoring.

With lumpectomy, the breast is preserved. The goal of a lumpectomy is to remove the tumor intact with some of the normal surrounding tissue to ensure that no cancer cells are left behind. This is confirmed by the absence of cancer cells on the edges of the tissue removed. The tissue from surgery is sent to the pathologist, who will issue a report that



includes either "negative" or "positive" margins. Negative margins mean no cancer is present on the edges of the tissue. If the margins are positive (meaning cancer cells are present on the edges of the removed tissue), then a second surgery is needed to remove more tissue to ensure clearance of the cancer.

Sometimes, a "sentinel lymph node biopsy" is performed at the time of lumpectomy. The sentinel nodes are the first nodes in the chain of lymph nodes in the underarm. If these lymph nodes do not contain cancer, then it can be assumed that cancer has not spread outside of the breast.

Depending on the size of the lumpectomy, there may be slight changes in the size and shape of the breast.

Almost always, radiation therapy is recommended after a lumpectomy for breast cancer.

PREPARING FOR AND RECOVERING FROM A LUMPECTOMY

A lumpectomy with or without a sentinel lymph node biopsy is performed as an outpatient procedure under general anesthesia. Many centers offer nerve blocks prior to surgery to help with pain control after surgery. You will likely feel tired after surgery for a few days; it is recommended to take up to a week off from work. You will be able to complete your activities of daily living, and the only main restriction is no heavy lifting (more than a gallon of milk) to allow the area to heal. A few suggestions:

- You will not be able to shower for a few days after surgery, so you will want to shower the day before or the day of surgery
- Ask your healthcare team which medications you should take prior to surgery and which medications you should stop
- You will need a ride home from the hospital on the day of surgery
- Choose 1 person as the point of contact for the surgeon and have that person communicate with a list of people you want to be kept informed.

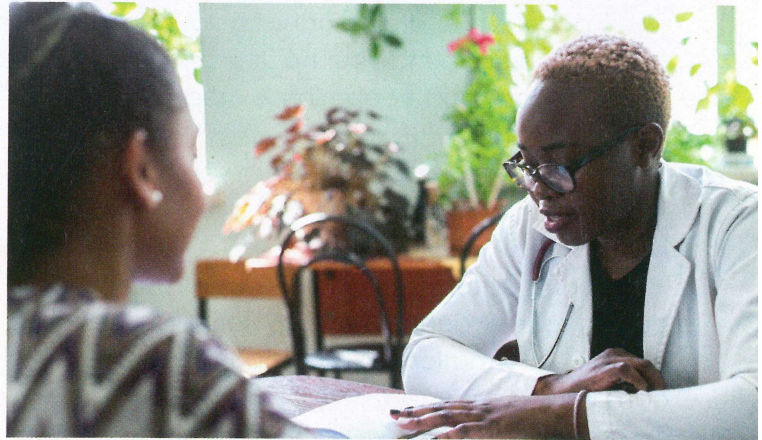
MASTECTOMY

The second type of surgery is a mastectomy, which is the removal of the entire breast. Usually, patients undergoing mastectomies are admitted to the hospital for pain control. Mastectomies can be performed with or without reconstruction. Depending on the type and extent of breast cancer, reconstruction can be started at the time of mastectomy or delayed until the breast cancer treatment is completed. If a patient does not wish to have reconstruction, or it is recommended that reconstruction be delayed, the breast tissue along with the nipple is removed, and the chest is left flat. With reconstruction, the nipple can be preserved if it is free of cancer.

Drains are placed at the time of the mastectomy to collect fluid that develops as a normal response of the body anytime tissue is removed.

PREPARING FOR AND RECOVERING FROM A MASTECTOMY

Although you will be able to complete your activities of daily living, you will want to have support



available. No heavy lifting is permitted, and recovery can be 4 to 6 weeks depending on the type of reconstruction. A few suggestions:

- You will not be able to shower for a few days after surgery, so you will want to shower the day before or the day of surgery
- Ask your healthcare team which medications you should take prior to surgery and which medications you should stop

MASTECTOMIES CAN BE PERFORMED WITH OR WITHOUT RECONSTRUCTION.

- Choose 1 person as the point of contact for the surgeon and have that person communicate with a list of people you want to be kept informed
- Pack a hospital bag with loose comfortable clothing that opens easily in the front
- Organize your closet and dressers so that these types of clothes are easily accessible when you come home
- You will go home with a bra from the hospital, but you may also want to have comfortable bras or camisoles at home for when you are allowed to remove your hospital bra
- You can pin your drains to whatever bra or shirt is comfortable, purchase bras with