

Breast implant

A breast implant is a prosthesis used to alter the size and shape of a woman's breasts (known as breast augmentation, breast enlargement, mammoplasty enlargement, augmentation mammoplasty or the common slang term boob job) for cosmetic reasons, to reconstruct the breast (e.g. after a mastectomy or to correct congenital chest wall deformities), or as an aspect of male-to-female sex reassignment surgery.

Pectoral implants are a related device used in cosmetic and reconstructive procedures of the male chest wall. A breast tissue expander is a temporary breast implant used during staged breast reconstruction procedures.

Types of breast implants

There are two primary types of breast implants: saline-filled and silicone-gel-filled implants. Saline implants have a silicone elastomer shell filled with sterile saline liquid. Silicone gel implants have a silicone shell filled with a viscous silicone gel. Several alternative types of breast implants had been developed, such as polypropylene string or soy oil, but these are no longer manufactured.

Procedure

The surgical procedure for breast augmentation takes approximately one to two hours. Variations in the procedure include the incision type, implant material, and implant pocket placement. Your surgeon will talk you through the procedure that is the most suitable for you. Firstly you will be marked for your operation and given a general anesthetic. Incisions will then be made either around the areola (the dark bit surrounding the nipple), in the armpit, in the crease underneath the breast or through the navel. The surgeon will then create a pocket to place the implant either under the breast tissue or deeper under the muscle of the breast. Once the implants have been fitted and the surgeon is happy with the shape, the incisions will be closed. Sometimes drains are fitted to avoid build-up of fluid, but will be removed after your initial check-up.

Recovery

Depending on the level of activity required, patients are generally able to resume normal activity in approximately one week's time. Women who have their implants placed underneath the muscle (submuscular placement) will generally have a longer recovery time and experience slightly more pain due to the muscle being cut during surgery. Exercise and strenuous physical activity will often need to be avoided for up to six weeks. During initial recovery arm movement is encouraged to help lessen the discomfort.

Complications

Surgeries involving breast implants, whether for cosmetic or reconstructive surgery, carry risk common to many types of surgery. These include adverse reactions to anesthesia, post-operative bleeding (hematoma) or fluid collection (seroma), surgical site infection or breakdown, breast pain or alterations in sensation, unfavorable scarring, interference with breast feeding, visible wrinkling, asymmetry, thinning of the breast tissue, and symmastia (disruption of the natural plane between breasts which is sometimes referred to as 'bread loafing').