

BREAST RECONSTRUCTION – TIPS FROM WOMEN

RESOURCE SHEET

November 2010

In response to Breast Cancer Network Australia's breast reconstruction survey, carried out in October 2010, women provided some useful tips for other women considering breast reconstruction.

Take your time and do it when you are ready. Keep visiting plastic surgeons and asking questions until you find the surgeon and the approach that is right for you. Be sure to find out the timeline of the whole procedure – many involve several stages – and find out how much time off work is recommended at each stage so you can plan ahead for sick leave or holidays.

Do your research

- Ask for referrals to more than one breast reconstructive surgeon so you can 'shop around' to find one with whom you feel comfortable and confident
- Get more than one quote – charges can vary considerably from surgeon to surgeon
- Consider all the options for reconstruction techniques
- Ask whether an immediate reconstruction (i.e. at the time of your breast cancer surgery) may be appropriate for you
- Ask lots of questions of the surgeon/s and insist on answers
- Ask to see photos of the surgeon's previous breast reconstruction surgeries
- Talk to other women who have had, or have considered, reconstruction (You could try writing a blog on the BCNA online network if you don't know anyone who has been in this situation)
- Talk to other health care professionals, e.g. a breast care nurse, for advice about breast reconstruction and to discuss any concerns you may have
- Be realistic about the possible outcome/s of any surgery



Do your homework and find out your options (costs, where and when to get the surgery done, which surgeon, etc.). Talk with women who've had it done – there are lots of things the surgeons don't tell you!!! It's important that you have realistic expectations.

Have realistic expectations and be sure you know what the end result will entail. For example, is it alright with YOU that there will be scars and that the sensation in the breast area may be non-existent.

Surgery in the public hospital system

Put your name on a public hospital waiting list as soon as you can, even if you're not sure if you will want a reconstruction. You can use the waiting time to investigate your options and make your decision. You can always remove your name from the list if you decide not to have a reconstruction.





While you are on the waiting list, keep in touch with your breast care nurse. She can provide advice about reconstruction options, and talk to you about how you are feeling so you don't feel forgotten.

If you live in a major city where there is more than one public hospital, shop around for a hospital with shorter waiting lists.

Surgery in the private health system

If you are considering having your surgery in the private system and don't have full private health insurance cover, consider upgrading your plan to 'public hospital, private patient'. These plans are cheaper than the top hospital plans and allow you to choose your own surgeon. There will probably be a 12-month waiting period before you are eligible, but your out-of-pocket expenses should be reduced.

Ask your private health insurance fund for a list of the plastic and reconstruction surgeons in your city/state with whom they have a 'gap cover' agreement.

Practical tips for your hospital stay and recovery period

- Buy some nighties that open at the front
- Wear old soft singlets that are comfortable and that won't matter if they get stained by creams etc.
- If you live alone, have a family member or friend come and stay with you for a few weeks after you are released from hospital
- See a physiotherapist for some appropriate post-operative exercises
- Be as well organised as you can before going into hospital for your surgery
- Be organised for when you come home from hospital, e.g. put items you use every day in the shower, pantry etc. where you can reach them easily.