

Weighing the Benefits of Breast Reduction Surgery

It was the pressure in her back, neck and shoulders that caused Teresa Spikes-Hamilton so much discomfort. The cause? The size of her breasts – DDD. “I had to wear several layers of clothes and sometimes a girdle to help support myself,” says Teresa.

In April 2013, Teresa underwent breast reduction surgery at HCGH to decrease the size of her breasts to a D cup. Today, she is pain free.

What is Breast Reduction Surgery?

Breast reduction is the surgical removal of excess breast fat, glandular tissue and skin to achieve a proportional breast size for your body as well as to alleviate discomfort due to overly large breasts.

“The weight of excess breast tissue can impact your ability to live an active lifestyle,” explains Teresa’s doctor, **Eric Chang, M.D.**, a board-certified plastic surgeon on staff at HCGH. “These women often battle with self-consciousness and physical discomfort and pain.”

How is it Performed?

The exact technique to reduce your breast size will depend on a variety of factors including breast composition, the desired amount of reduction and your personal preferences. “Everyone is different, but, for most patients, this is an outpatient procedure done under general anesthesia in about three hours,” says Dr. Chang. “While you can see the results immediately, you will have post-surgical swelling that goes away. The surgery does leave scars around the nipple and/or under the breast. However, these usually will be hidden by a swimsuit or bra and often fade and improve over time.”

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Recovery

According to Dr. Chang, patients typically have a two- to three-week recovery and can return to the gym after six weeks. “As the surgery involves repositioning the areola, some patients may lose sensation in the nipple,” notes Dr. Chang. “As with any surgical procedure, you should review all risks and benefits with your physician.”

Is it Right for Me?

“The decision to undergo breast reduction surgery is highly personal,” stresses Dr. Chang. “Do it for yourself and not as a means to fulfill someone else’s desires or fit any sort of ideal body image. Talk with your doctor to determine if the procedure will achieve your goals.”

According to Dr. Chang, breast reduction may be advisable if:

- You don’t smoke.
- Your breasts are too large or limit your physical activity.
- You have back/neck/shoulder pain.
- You have shoulder grooves from bra straps and/or skin rashes beneath your breast crease.
- You have low-hanging breasts and stretched skin including enlarged areolas.

“Patients often ask if they should lose weight before having surgery,” says Dr. Chang. “In a perfect world, you want to get as close as you can to your ideal weight. However, overly large breasts present a catch-22 for many women; they can’t exercise because of their breast size.”

“After recovering from the surgery, I went jogging – something I could not do before. I could actually fit into a regular sports bra and work out without pain.”

- Teresa Spikes-Hamilton

“Following surgery, patients often are able to do things they couldn’t do before. They feel better about how they look, and surgery kick-starts a total body improvement,” says Dr. Chang. “There are a lot of women who for some reason aren’t doing this, but the first thing a woman in her 60s often tells me after surgery is: ‘I don’t know why this took me so long!’”

“Besides feeling so much better, I’m saving money because I don’t have to purchase special-size expensive bras!” says Teresa. “I feel as if a weight has truly been lifted off me in so many ways.”



Common Questions

- Q: Can you breastfeed after having this surgery?**
- A:** There is a misperception that this procedure makes the breast nonfunctional. The nipples maintain their attachment to the ducts in most cases. Current data shows that about 85 percent of women who would otherwise be able to breastfeed will be able to do so after surgery.
- Q: Is it covered by insurance?**
- A:** This depends on the insurance company and the severity of the problem. Many insurance companies require documentation of the functional problems and pain you are experiencing before making a decision.

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**Breast Reduction Surgery:
Your Questions Answered**

With Eric Chang, M.D., and
Sarah Mess, M.D.