

PLASTIC SURGERY

Breast implants & what you need to know

They are on the rise,
and not just for purely
cosmetic reasons



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The main reason women opt for breast implants is to improve their self-confidence by enhancing the size and shape of their breasts. Breasts are one of the most visible symbols of femininity, and due to social and cultural pressures, many women feel this is a part of their body that they want to improve on. This may mean an increase in volume, or replacement of volume lost after breastfeeding or weight loss. Larger and more shapely breasts give a more proportionate figure, and allow women to look and feel better in clothes and swimsuits.

The other reason is health-related. An increasingly discussed reason for breast implant surgery is for breast reconstruction. This may follow breast cancer surgery, where the breast needs to be removed. It may also be used in the case of an undeveloped breast on one or both sides – a condition known as Poland syndrome. In addition, it may be to improve symmetry in those women with very significant differences in the size of their breasts, such that it is impossible to find a bra that fits.



WHAT IS AN IMPLANT LIKE?

A silicone implant is akin to a large fruit pastille, with a defined shape and a soft consistency. It has an outer silicone covering, and is filled with silicone gel. Saline implants, on the other hand, are inserted in the body first before being inflated with saline. They come in various predetermined sizes and volumes based on the manufacturers' specifications.

Shape matters

Trends in breast augmentation are changing in that women are not just looking for a size increase. They also care about the shape of their breasts, so there is greater interest in shaped or teardrop implants now. In the past, round implants were the norm.

For a woman who has lost her breast to cancer, the use of a breast implant is one of the methods of reconstruction. In recent years, there is growing awareness of breast cancer, and of certain genetic conditions that predispose a woman to a high risk of breast cancer.

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reconstruct symmetrical breasts with a relatively quick recovery for the patient.

How are implants chosen?

Selection of breast implants, whether for cosmetic or reconstructive purposes, needs to follow the basic tenet that it should fit the patient's chest wall dimensions. Measurements need to be taken, and there is no 'perfect' or 'ideal' size of implant.

In reconstructive breast surgery, when one side is being reconstructed with an implant, consideration needs to be given to the size and shape of the opposite breast, since the aim is to reconstruct a breast that is fairly similar in size and shape. If both sides are being reconstructed, teardrop-shaped implants would simulate natural breasts.

How is an implant inserted?

An incision is made either under the breast, around the areola or in the armpit. The implant is then inserted behind the breast tissue, or behind both the breast tissue and the chest muscle. Once a precise space is created, the implant is fitted into it. The plastic surgeon will discuss the pros and cons of the different incision locations, and determine and advise on the best placement

for the individual.

In Singapore, silicone implants are more commonly used today. However, there are implants with different fill materials such as saline and polyurethane that are also used. Breast implants generally have a long lifespan but it is best to see your plastic surgeon yearly for a check-up. In case of leakage of the implant, it would be advisable to remove and replace it.

Understanding your reasons

The conversation that takes place when a patient requests breast implants determines the next step, because it is important that the patient understands her own motivations. For instance, such questions need to be answered: what is it you do not like about your breasts? Are you considering augmentation for your own self-esteem, or are you doing this to please someone else? What size and shape of breast would you like to have?

I would advise against surgery if the patient has unrealistic expectations about the size of implant that she would like to have, or if the patient herself has significant reservations about the surgery and is feeling pressured into it to please her partner. 

