

LIPOSUCTION

AFTER BREAST RECONSTRUCTION SURGERY

This fact sheet gives general information for women who are having liposuction after breast reconstruction surgery and/or liposculpture (also called fat grafting and lipofilling), or are thinking about having these procedures.

Liposuction is a body contouring procedure that is used to remove fat from different parts of the body. The fat is removed with the use of a metal tube (cannula) attached to suction. This acts like a vacuum and is passed in and out of the tissue to remove fat. Liposuction can play a part in smoothing out and defining the skin's contours following breast reconstruction.

The fat removed during liposuction can be injected back into the patient to normalise breast shape and sometimes to increase breast volume. This procedure is called liposculpture, fat grafting or lipofilling.

Liposuction

The area that requires liposuction can vary and your surgeon will discuss this with you. For example, liposuction can be performed around the thigh or abdomen and is sometimes used to smooth the edges of abdominal scars. Liposuction can also be performed within the breast or underarm (axilla) to improve breast symmetry and is usually performed under general anaesthetic as a day procedure.

Post-operative care

It is common to have considerable pain, bruising and swelling at the site of any liposuction. This is temporary and will ease over one to three weeks. The incision site for liposuction is usually about 0.5cm in length and is normally closed with a stitch and covered with a dry dressing or glue or a waterproof dressing. It is not uncommon for light blood-coloured fluid to ooze from this site and it should settle within 24 hours. The stitch will be removed seven to ten days after surgery.

To reduce swelling, bruising and discomfort we recommend that the area is well supported. If the liposuction was performed around the thighs or abdomen, wearing supportive compression shorts will help. The compression shorts or pants should give medium to firm compression. If the liposuction was performed around the breast or underarm we recommend a supportive bra. The bra should have a wide band under the cup, as well as having wide back and side support. We recommend you wear these supportive garments for six weeks (day and night) post-surgery.

You are able to shower normally as the dressings over the liposuction site should dry out. If the dressing stays wet, change the dressing.

Avoid any heavy physical activity for at least two weeks after this procedure. Limit your activity to what feels comfortable.

Liposculpture, lipofilling, or fat grafting

Liposculpture, lipofilling and fat grafting generally all mean the same thing. When we use these terms here, they refer to injecting fat into the breast to increase volume or improve breast symmetry. This procedure is performed at the same time as liposuction. Due to about 50 per cent of the injected fat being reabsorbed by the body it is expected that several procedures may be required to achieve the desired effect.

Post-operative care

It is common to experience mild to moderate pain as well as bruising and swelling at the site of liposculpture, although considerably less than at the site of liposuction. The site of fat injection may be closed with a stitch and this stitch will be removed about seven to ten days after surgery.

To help reduce swelling, bruising and discomfort, we recommend that the area is well supported by wearing a bra for six weeks (day and night). The bra should have a wide band under the cup, as well as having wide back and side support. You are able to shower as normal.

Avoid any heavy physical activity for at least two weeks after this procedure. Limit your activity to what feels comfortable.

Infection is uncommon following surgery; however, it is very important to contact the Breast Service if you have any signs of infection such as fever, or increasing pain, redness or swelling around the wound.

An appointment will be made for you to attend the RMH Complex Wound Clinic in the first week following surgery; followed by an appointment at the Breast Plastics Clinic four to six weeks post-surgery.

Scar management

Our aim is minimise any scarring as much as possible. We use different techniques at different times to achieve this:

Week 1 to 6

Micropore is paper tape that provides gentle support to your wound and helps to flatten the scar. The tape is to be worn continuously and changed once a week. You are able to shower with the tape on, but ensure you dry it off afterwards. Do not use any creams or oils on your scars during this time.

Week 6 onwards

Massage and moisturising with a gentle cream (e.g. Cetaphil Moisturising Cream, sorbolene) will help soften the scar and break up any underlying scar tissue. This will encourage the scar to become flatter and smoother. Massage should be done in a firm circular motion along the length of the healed scar. Massage any scars three to four times a day for at least five minutes each time.

6 weeks to 12 months

Silicone gels and sheets can be used to help lock in moisture as well as put pressure on a scar to flatten and soften it. Silicone should only be used on wounds once they are completely healed (normally after 6 weeks, but please check with your doctor/nurse). They can be used for many months; however, most silicone sheets need to be applied gradually in case your skin has an allergic reaction to them.

Some patients occasionally develop lumps in the breast following liposculpture. These lumps are usually due to fat that has not survived the transfer process and formed an oil cyst. Sometimes these lumps may need investigation with radiological tests or biopsy.

For more information

For more information and advice or if you require medical assistance please contact:

Breast Care Nurse

The Royal Women's Hospital
(03) 8345 2000 (switchboard, ask for pager 53100)
(03) 8345 3565 (Monday to Friday during business hours, leave a message if phone unattended)

Breast Care Nurse

The Royal Melbourne Hospital
(03) 9342 8120