

# Renewing Body Image Through Breast Restoration

A woman's sense of femininity is intimately related to the appearance of her breasts. A loss or disfigurement of the breast can arise as a result of a mastectomy or lumpectomy, a defect present since birth, or as an undesired outcome of a previous cosmetic surgery. In the past, a woman's options for restoration were limited in the ability to achieve a natural looking and natural feeling breast. New techniques, materials used in surgery, and design in breast implants have given the plastic surgeon an opportunity to provide a woman with beautiful results.

When complete restoration of the breast, or overall improvement of the breast shape is needed, a silicone gel breast implant is most commonly recommended. The most important issue of breast restoration surgery is the patient's safety, and very few devices in medicine have received more attention or undergone more research and testing over the past 30 years than the current generation of silicone gel breast implants.

After numerous studies showing long-term safety, silicone gel breast implants received U.S. FDA approval for cosmetic use in 2006, although patients undergoing reconstruction for breast cancer have always been afforded the option of silicone gel implants instead of saline-filled implants. Silicone is advantageous due to a softer, more natural feel of the implant, and today's fourth-generation of implants are further improved with a stronger shell that is designed to prevent any compromise of the implant. The gel is more cohesive (binding to itself) and if the

implant were cut in half, there would be no movement of the gel outside of the shell.

Ample tissue to cover and support a breast implant has long been an obstacle to women. Despite the natural feel provided by silicone implants, patients may have either had the majority of their breast tissue removed during a mastectomy, or may have very thin tissue from multiple prior surgeries, or as a result of heredity. Today, regenerative medicine and the development of bioengineered tissue substitutes, known as acellular dermal matrices (derived from a layer of the skin known as the dermis), provide substantial improvement. These tissue substitutes act as an internal skin graft, initially covering and supporting the implant, and ultimately becoming incorporated with the body's own tissues.

An improvement to a natural looking breast is even further advanced by a plastic surgeon who is experienced in techniques that use a patient's own natural tissues – namely, fat grafting. Fat from the areas outside of the breast, such as the belly or thighs, is relocated to enhance the size, shape, and natural feel of the breast. This technique refines areas of the breast where the edge of the implant may be seen or felt, such as the cleavage. Fat grafting provides a natural solution to improve very thin areas of the breast, and allows the patient to use her own tissue, particularly from unwanted areas of excess fat.

In my view, breast restoration is a chance to enhance a woman's confidence and renew her sense of self. As the number of breast cancer

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PLASTIC SURGERY • BREAST RESTORATION



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survivors increases (more than 250 million in the U.S.), women are becoming increasingly educated on the innovations and options available to restore a natural appearing and feeling breast. As a result, more women are electing to have breast restoration surgery and to revise the outcome of prior and unsatisfactory breast surgeries.

The new generation of breast implants, the development of tissues engineered to substitute for your own, and the use of your own fat for additional contouring of the breast, have shaped an exciting, hopeful new era in breast surgery. These advances have been expanded beyond the breast to other areas of plastic surgery, enhancing the ability of a plastic surgeon skilled in these innovations to make you feel confident, beautiful, and whole.

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