

Risks of Breast Reconstruction

You and your doctors will decide what breast reconstruction technique is best for your needs. As with all surgeries, breast reconstruction surgery does carry some risks. This resource provides general risk information that you should discuss in detail with your doctors.

Risks of breast reconstruction with an implant include:

- Changes in breast sensation, including loss of sensation around the nipple and areola
- Noticeable scar
- Asymmetry of the breasts, which requires more surgery on the natural breast
- Implant rupture or deflation
- Increased risk of future breast surgery to replace or remove the breast implant
- Changes in breast sensation
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Scar tissue that forms and compresses the implant and breast tissue into a hard, unnatural shape (capsular contracture)

Correcting any of these complications may require additional surgery. If you need adjuvant radiation therapy, you might not be an ideal candidate for breast implant reconstruction. Radiation therapy often leaves the skin and underlying tissue discolored or damaged. In such cases, doctors tend to recommend breast reconstruction with a tissue flap instead.

Risks of breast reconstruction with flap surgery include:

- Changes in breast sensation, including loss of sensation around the nipple and areola
- Noticeable scar
- Asymmetry of the breasts, which requires more surgery on the natural breast
- Prolonged time in surgery and under anesthesia
- Extended recovery and healing time
- Poor wound healing
- Fluid collection (seroma)
- Infection
- Bleeding into the area where the breast used to be, sometimes requiring a second surgery to control the bleeding
- Loss of the flap because of tissue death (necrosis) due to insufficient blood supply, requiring more surgery to save the flap or remove it
- Loss of sensation at the tissue donor site
- Abdominal wall hernia or weakness

Radiation therapy delivered to the skin and chest wall may pose complications during healing if it's given after breast reconstruction surgery. Your doctor may recommend waiting until you're finished with radiation therapy before proceeding with breast reconstruction.

As a general reminder, risks of any surgery include:

- Blood clots in the legs that may travel to the lungs
- Blood loss
- Breathing problems
- Heart attack or stroke during surgery
- Infection, including in the surgical wound, lungs (pneumonia), bladder, or kidney
- Reactions to medicines