

Prophylactic mastectomy for women at high risk of breast cancer

Bilateral prophylactic (pro-fi-LAK-tic) mastectomy (also called preventive mastectomy) is the removal of both breasts to prevent breast cancer. It can lower the risk of breast cancer in women at high risk by about 90 percent or more.

Some women with a *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene mutation or a strong family history of breast cancer may choose this option to ease their worries about getting breast cancer. It may also make them feel they have done all they can do to prevent it.

A woman at high risk for breast cancer should talk with her doctor about the pros and cons of prophylactic mastectomy. Like any surgery, there can be complications.

Prophylactic mastectomy for breast cancer survivors

Some women who have had cancer in one breast may choose prophylactic mastectomy to lower the chances of getting cancer in the other breast.

Reconstruction

After a prophylactic mastectomy, a woman may choose to have breast reconstruction. Reconstruction is plastic surgery to restore the look and shape of a breast after it has been removed. Breast reconstruction can be done at the same time as the mastectomy or at a later date. Discuss your options with your plastic surgeon. He or she can help you choose the type of reconstruction that will give you the best results. You may want to get a second opinion about your plastic surgery options.

No need to rush

Decisions about any surgery can be tough. Take time to gather information, talk with your doctor, get a second opinion and discuss your options with your family and those closest to you.

If you have a family history of breast cancer, talk with your doctor about genetic counseling. Genetic testing will show whether or not you have a gene mutation that may increase your risk of breast cancer. This information can help you make decisions about your breast care.

The best decision is one that is well thought out and one that you are comfortable with, not one that is rushed.

Insurance concerns

Some insurance companies do not cover the cost of prophylactic mastectomy. If your insurance company does not approve, ask your doctor or another member of your health care team to contact them. Have your doctor explain the reasons why this surgery is needed.



Decisions about any surgery can be difficult and complex. The best decision is one that is well thought out and one with which you are comfortable

Am I still at risk for breast cancer after prophylactic mastectomy?

Yes. While this surgery greatly reduces your chances of developing breast cancer, it does not remove all risk. It is impossible to remove all the breast tissue. Even though it is unlikely, cancer can still develop in the tissue left on the chest wall or underarm area. So, it is important to get regular follow-up care and clinical breast exams after surgery to make sure that any breast cancer is caught early.

Resources

Many hospitals have or can refer you to support groups for women at high risk of breast cancer in your area. You can also contact these organizations for more information:

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

CancerCare®
1-800-813-HOPE (4673)
www.cancercare.org

Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE)
1-866-288-RISK (7475)
www.facingourrisk.org

Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF)
1-800-532-5274
www.patientadvocate.org

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Reconstruction & Prosthesis
- Breast Surgery
- Sexuality & Intimacy

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