

# Prophylactic Mastectomy

## What is a prophylactic mastectomy?

A prophylactic (pro-fi-LAK-tic) mastectomy (also called a preventive mastectomy) reduces a woman's risk of breast cancer by surgically removing her breasts even before cancer has been found. After speaking with a health care provider, a woman may choose to have a prophylactic mastectomy if she has:

- had cancer in one breast and wants to lower her chances of getting cancer in the other breast
- had a biopsy showing lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)
- a genetic mutation which makes it more likely for her to develop breast cancer
- a strong family history of breast cancer

Your doctor may talk with you about a prophylactic mastectomy, but your decision should be made only after weighing all the facts. Like any surgery, you may or may not have side effects. Please refer to the *Breast Surgery* fact sheet for more information.

## Options after surgery

After a prophylactic mastectomy, a woman may choose to have breast reconstruction. Reconstruction involves plastic surgery to restore the look and shape of a breast after it has been removed. If you are interested in reconstruction, ask your doctor for more information. Seek several opinions about plastic surgery options and let your doctor know which you prefer.

## No need to rush

Decisions about any surgery can be difficult. Take time to gather information, talk to your doctor, get a second opinion and discuss your options with family and friends. If you have a family history of breast cancer, talk to 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. Having this information can help you make an informed decision. The best decision is one that is well thought out and one that you are comfortable with, not one that is rushed. Talk to your doctor about whether you should take a drug that may reduce your risk of developing breast cancer, such as tamoxifen or raloxifene and about joining breast cancer prevention trials.

## Insurance concerns

Some insurance companies feel that a prophylactic mastectomy is unnecessary. If your health insurance company gives you problems about your decision, ask your doctor or another member of your health care team to contact them. Have your doctor explain, with medical evidence, the reasons why this surgery is necessary for you.



*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?

The answer is yes. Although this greatly reduces your chances of developing breast cancer, it is not a guarantee. It is almost impossible to remove all the breast tissue. Even though it is unlikely, cancer can still develop in the tissue that is left on the chest wall or underarm area.

That is why it is important to schedule regular follow-up care and breast exams after surgery to make sure that any breast cancer is caught early.

## Resources

Many hospitals have or can refer you to cancer programs or support groups in your area. You can also contact these organizations for more information:

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®  
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

American Cancer Society  
1-800-ACS-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

*Breast Cancer*™ Network of Strength  
1-800-221-2141 (English) or  
1-800-986-9505 (Spanish)  
[www.networkofstrength.org](http://www.networkofstrength.org)

CancerCare®  
1-800-813-HOPE (4673)  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

Patient Advocate Foundation  
1-800-532-5274  
[www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

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