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Breast reconstruction using women's own tissue appears safe, study says

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Few short-term complications found with 'autologous' transplants.

(HealthDay)—Women who have breast reconstruction surgery using a transplanted flap of their own tissue have a low rate of short-term complications, a new study says.

Tissue expansion with an implant is the most common type of breast reconstruction for breast cancer patients who have undergone mastectomy (breast removal), the study authors said. But many women prefer the more natural results when their own tissue is used for the procedure, a process called autologous breast reconstruction.

However, it hasn't been known which autologous breast reconstruction technique provides the best results and has the lowest risk of post-surgical complications.

In this study, researchers analyzed data from nearly 3,300 women in the United States who underwent three different types of autologous breast reconstruction and found that the overall rate of complications in the 30 days after surgery was 12.5 percent.

The risk varied by the type of flap procedure, however. The rates of complications were about 7 percent, 13 percent and 19 percent for the three types of flap procedures examined in the study, according to the findings, which were published in the February issue of the Journal of the American College of Surgeons.

The method with the lowest complication rates used flaps from the latissimus area of the patient's back; however, that procedure might cause different side effects not tracked in the database used in the study, the authors noted.

Overall, the three procedures are generally safe and there are few serious complications, the researchers concluded.

"There are minor and treatable flap complications that can occur, such as wound infection. But serious complications, such as heart attack, were rare," principal investigator Dr. John Kim, an associate professor of surgery at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, said in a journal news release.

"Our study dispels the notion that autologous breast reconstruction has major medical complications," added Kim, who also is a plastic and reconstructive surgeon at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

More information: Breastcancer.org has more about breast reconstruction.

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