

Survey: Many US women lack basic information on life after mastectomy

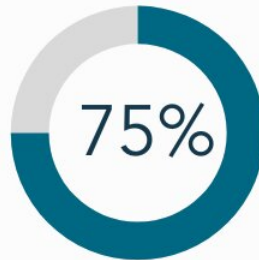
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LIFE AFTER A MASTECTOMY

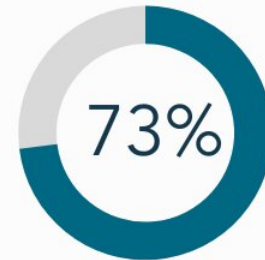
New data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons shows that many women may not have received enough information to know how breast reconstruction would impact them financially, emotionally and physically:



of women aren't sure of all of their options for breast reconstruction.



of women aren't sure if it's possible to breastfeed after breast reconstruction.



of women aren't sure if insurance will cover breast reconstruction.



Study finds many women simply don't know about concerns ranging from breastfeeding and breast sensation to insurance coverage for breast reconstruction. Credit: American Society of Plastic Surgeons

As many as [50 percent of cancer patients](#) who've undergone a mastectomy have elected to have breast reconstruction surgery. Yet, while breast reconstruction is a common procedure, a new national survey finds that many women may have not received adequate information to evaluate how it may impact them physically, financially and emotionally.

A new survey conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) among over 2,000 adults in the United States measured common myths and misconceptions about [breast reconstruction surgery](#). While women have many choices in reconstructive breast [surgery](#)—including the option not to have the procedure—more than half of (54%) of women are unsure if there are [surgical options](#) beyond breast implants. Other results that highlighted a need for greater awareness include:

- 62% of women do not know it is possible to regain sensation in the breast and 75% of women do not know it is possible to breastfeed after [breast reconstruction](#). While surgical techniques allow women to regain sensation in their breasts and even allow some new mothers to breastfeed their infants, many women who were surveyed were unaware that these were possible after surgery.
- 73% of women are unsure if they'd be responsible for paying for the surgery, though federal law requires insurance companies to cover the cost of reconstructive surgery after a mastectomy.

"It's important that patients receive clear information and are helped to understand all of their breast reconstruction surgery options," said Bernard Lee, MD, MBA, MPH, President of The Plastic Surgery Foundation (The PSF). "There are still some misunderstandings around this procedure that often influence whether patients choose to even explore their treatment options. It's important to clear up any

misconceptions to provide patients the best care possible."

Dr. Lee says it's important that information about the surgical options is communicated concisely and effectively to patients—and that there are often preconceived notions about breast reconstruction surgery that he debunks.

"While reconstruction with breast implants is a good option for many patients seeking breast reconstruction after a mastectomy, it's not the only option," said Dr. Lee. "Many plastic surgeons also offer innovative microsurgical breast reconstruction procedures that use the patient's own tissue from other areas—such as the abdomen, buttock, back or thigh—to recreate a natural-looking breast. Patients need to be educated on all their options so they can make the best choice for themselves and their lives after mastectomy."

Recognizing that patients deserve [accurate information](#) to make the best decisions impacting their care, ASPS and The PSF launched the Breast Reconstruction Awareness Campaign and the annual Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day.

"At a time when a breast cancer patient is faced with a difficult change in their life, we want to engage, educate, and empower patients to make a choice that's best for them, which includes knowing their breast reconstruction options. BRA Day helps us to do that," said Lee.

The Breast Reconstruction Awareness campaign involves informing patients, family, caregivers and media that the breast cancer loop remains open until a woman is informed of breast reconstruction options. Local BRA Day events are scheduled throughout the nation on October 19 and both the ongoing campaign and events seek to help raise funds to support research and grants in local communities and nationally.

Beyond the physical impact of mastectomy, there is an emotional component too, as women may experience a period of mourning due to the change in their body. Yet, the survey noted that nearly one third of women (29%) do not know there's a period of emotional adjustment following breast reconstruction. As breast reconstruction patient [Jen Rozenbaum](#) can attest, it was an emotional experience every time she looked in the mirror. Rozenbaum was diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago and underwent a double mastectomy followed by eight rounds of chemotherapy and four breast reconstruction surgeries to regain what she describes as her sense of self.

"Breast reconstruction isn't so much about the breasts as it is about the mind and how we feel as women and how we see ourselves as women," said Rozenbaum. "For me, it made a world of difference. I couldn't be more grateful for my surgery team who took the time to walk me through all my options and help me select the best treatment plan."

As a photographer, Jen publicly documented her journey through breast reconstruction by turning the camera around on herself showing the reality of what a breast cancer body looks like after healing from breast cancer. Jen hoped that through sharing, she would help other women who are exploring breast reconstruction.

"I couldn't be happier with my surgeries because I finally felt like I recognized the woman that I saw in the mirror again," said Rozenbaum. "Online, I see so many women who are hesitant about the procedure or scared about their treatment options. I make sure to share my success story so that I can boost their confidence and empower them to take control of their bodies."

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons from September 27-29, 2022 among 2,047 U.S. adults ages 18+ among whom

1,129 are women. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within +/- 2.8 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

Provided by American Society of Plastic Surgeons

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