

Understanding Nipple Reconstruction Alternatives after a Mastectomy

Breast Reconstruction Specialist Dr. Constance M Chen explains what's involved in recreating a nipple for mastectomy patients

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, April 11, 2023

[/EINPresswire.com/](#) -- The objective of [breast reconstruction](#) after a mastectomy is to recreate new breasts to help a patient feel whole and normal after surgery. The traditional mastectomy resects the nipple-areola complex and leaves a woman with a straight line scar across her chest. New mastectomy techniques preserve the nipple-areolar complex so that no [nipple reconstruction](#) is needed. Nipple-sparing mastectomies allow a better aesthetic result because the entire skin envelope of the breast is preserved. Not all breast surgeons are trained to perform nipple-sparing mastectomies, however. When the nipple-areola complex is resected, it is possible to reconstruct the nipple and the areola as part of the breast reconstruction.

One common method of nipple reconstruction is to use the remaining breast skin after a mastectomy. A portion of the breast skin is folded and reshaped to form a new nipple. After the reconstructed nipple heals, the new nipple and surrounding skin is tattooed for color. In some cases, there is not enough healthy skin after a mastectomy to create a new nipple. In these instances, a skin graft may be used from another



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site, usually the groin. The skin graft is then folded and reshaped to create a new nipple. The new nipple from the groin can also be tattooed for color. For those women who undergo a unilateral mastectomy and have a large natural nipple on the remaining breast, it is possible to undergo a nipple-sharing technique. With nipple sharing, a portion of the native nipple is resected from the remaining breast, and the portion of the native nipple is transferred grafted onto the reconstructed breast.

Regardless of the type of nipple reconstruction undertaken, the reconstructed nipple is dressed with antibiotic ointment to reduce infection and a special medicated gauze dressing is then placed into a protective shield, or “nipple house”, that remains in place for a week to allow for protected healing.

After the reconstructed nipple has healed, additional tattooing may be used to add or alter the color and create the areola. In some cases, women choose to skip nipple reconstruction altogether, and instead choose a 3D tattoo approach which uses ink to create the illusion of a natural nipple on the breast mound without any actual change in the contours of the breast mound.

Breast reconstruction helps many women feel whole again after mastectomy. For many women, nipple reconstruction is the final touch that helps them feel like their breasts are truly restored. Looking at a body that appears more familiar helps many women move on after breast cancer to live a healthy and confident life.

[Constance M Chen](#), MD, is a board-certified plastic surgeon with a special expertise in the use of innovative natural techniques to optimize medical and cosmetic outcomes for women undergoing breast reconstruction. She is Clinical Assistant Professor of Surgery (Plastic Surgery) at Weill Cornell Medical College and Clinical Assistant Professor of Surgery (Plastic Surgery) at Tulane University School of Medicine. www.constancechenmd.com

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