

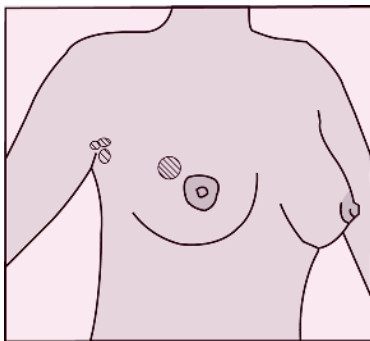
## Surgical treatment of breast cancer

Surgery is the oldest form of cancer treatment and it remains an important part of cancer treatment today. Surgery is now often combined with other types of treatment such as radiation, chemotherapy and hormone therapy to achieve greater success.

### Types of breast cancer surgeries

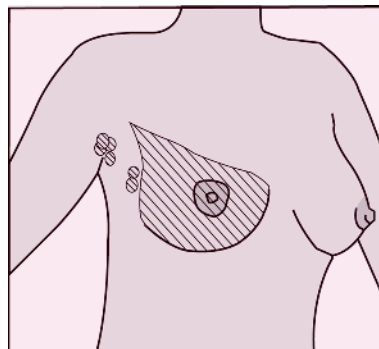
There are two main types of surgeries for breast cancer: breast conserving surgery (lumpectomy) and mastectomy. With breast conserving surgery, the surgeon tries to spare and preserve as much of the breast tissue as possible. With a mastectomy, the entire breast is removed.

#### Breast conserving surgery (which is usually followed by radiation therapy):



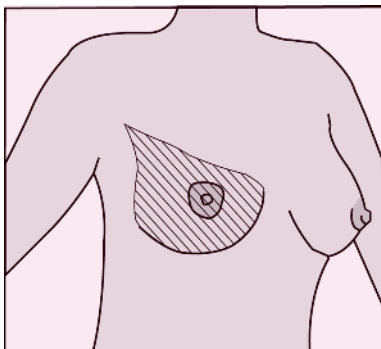
In a *lumpectomy*, the surgeon removes the breast cancer, some normal tissue around it and usually some of the lymph nodes in the underarm. This procedure may also be called partial or segmental mastectomy.

#### Modified radical mastectomy:



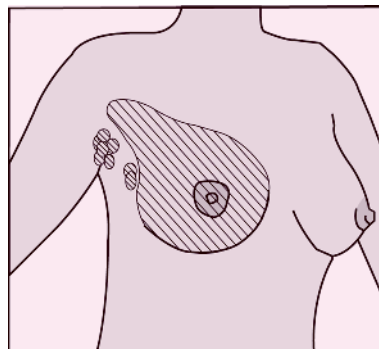
In a *modified radical mastectomy*, the surgeon removes the breast, the lining above the chest muscles and some of the underarm lymph nodes.

#### Total mastectomy:



In a *total (or simple) mastectomy*, the surgeon removes the entire breast.

#### Radical mastectomy:



Rarely done now, a *radical mastectomy* involves removing the breast, chest muscles and most of the lower, middle and upper lymph nodes.

## Which surgery is best for you?

- Ask your primary doctor to recommend surgeons for you. Find out more about the surgeons' qualifications, ability and experience by calling their offices or the local medical society. Choose a surgeon with expertise in breast surgery.
- Ask your surgeon which surgery options are best for you and why. You may want to get a second opinion if you have several surgical options.
- Think about what treatments you are willing to undergo. For example, if driving for daily radiation therapy is not possible, then breast conserving surgery may not be the best option for you.
- Research has shown breast conservation with radiation therapy to be an equally effective treatment as mastectomy for early stage breast cancer.

## You are not alone

If you are facing breast surgery, remember that there are millions of women who have been where you are today. They have had the same fears, made the same tough decisions, gone through surgery, recovered and are living full, productive lives. Best of all, they are more than willing to talk with you and to listen to you.

You can find these women in groups like American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery program and the YWCA ENCORE*plus* program. Ask a member of your health care team (doctors, nurses, dietitians or social workers) how to get in touch with these groups. They can help you find support groups in your area. If you have access to the Internet, you may be able to find support groups online.

## What to expect after surgery

Before surgery, ask your doctor about what changes you might expect afterwards. These may include the following:

- Like any surgery, there is always a risk of infection, bleeding or slow healing of the wound. If lymph nodes have been removed, you may experience collection of fluid under your skin, tingling, numbness, stiffness, pain, weakness or swelling in your arm. Some women experience none of these symptoms.
- Side effects like these should go away, especially with physical therapy. The therapist will suggest exercises you can do to regain movement and strength in your arm. If the aftereffects of surgery do not go away, be sure to tell your surgeon.
- In the end, only a scar should remain. Resume your normal activities as you feel comfortable and as prescribed by your doctor.

## Resources

### Organizations

American Society of Clinical Oncology  
1-888-651-3038  
[www.asco.org](http://www.asco.org)

American Society of Plastic Surgeons  
1-800-635-0635  
[www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org)

CancerCare for Online Support  
[www.cancercare.org/cancercareservices](http://www.cancercare.org/cancercareservices)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- Chemotherapy
- Radiation Therapy
- Axillary Lymph Nodes
- Breast Reconstruction & Prosthesis