

Too Much of a Good Thing? Breast Reduction Can Be a Blessing

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

It's not something husbands typically suggest or boyfriends offer to pay for. But for women with breast tissue so excessive that they suffer neck, shoulder or back pain, breast reduction surgery can bring wonderful relief.

Women with large breasts often experience deep grooving on their shoulders from bra straps, an uncomfortable pulling sensation on the chest, inability to wear many clothing styles, inability to exercise comfortably, and rashes under the breasts.

Breast reduction is an out-patient procedure. The skin and excess breast tissue is surgically reduced, mostly from the lower portion of the breast so that the resized breast can be positioned upward and will remain more elevated. The nipple and areola are carefully preserved to maintain good blood flow and sensation and repositioned upward on the newly shaped breast. After shaping the breast tissue to create a more youthful and lifted appearance, the skin is carefully closed. The incisions are usually located around the nipple, from the areola down to the fold beneath the breast, and sometimes within the fold beneath the breast, attempting to keep hem as short as possible to minimize scarring.

To optimize symmetry, the tissue removed from each breast is weighed during surgery, which along with pre-surgical photographs and skin markings helps to ensure the closest match of the two breasts. No two breasts are exactly equal before or after surgery.

Post-surgery, the patient wears a soft support bra for 2-3 weeks. Occasionally, a small plastic drainage tube is used to lessen accumulation of fluid, and then removed 1-2 days after surgery.

As with any surgery, there are risks the surgeon should fully discuss prior to scheduling. While some permanent decrease in nipple sensation is possible, sensation usually returns after a few months. While many patients nurse successfully after reduction, the ability to nurse may be lost. In very large breasts, or breasts with certain configurations, the nipple may have to be completely detached and replaced as a graft.

Most patients report minimal pain after breast reduction, but typically experience tightness or fullness for several days, gradually improving over the first 1-2 weeks. The usual schedule of recovery is: Bruising and swelling, 2-3 weeks; return to work & social activity, 7-10 days; aerobic or strenuous activity, 3-4 weeks.

Happily, the great majority of women who undergo breast reduction are extremely

because they have a much better proportioned figure afterwards, broader wardrobe choices and can often participate in activities and sports that were previously off limits.

After all, too much of a good thing can be a real pain.

David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS, a graduate of Columbia University - College of Physicians and Surgeons is Board Certified in Plastic Surgery and former Chief of Surgery at Coral Springs Medical Center. In practice in Coral Springs since 1989, he can be reached at 954-752-1020 or www.DrLevens.com.