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Mastopexy Can Lift Breasts and Spirits

By David J. Levens, MD, PA, FACS

Many women who keep their figures youthful through diet and exercise are frustrated that one area--sagging breasts--can't be substantially improved through a fitness regimen. Is it possible for women who aren't interested in boosting breast size through implants to improve their bustline and body image? The answer is "sometimes".

Breast lift (mastopexy) can significantly refresh the body image (and raise the spirits!) by eliminating the breast sagging that most commonly occurs as a result of pregnancy, aging, and weight fluctuation. Most mastopexies are performed on women in their 30s to 50s, but occasionally on younger women whose breasts simply developed in a droopy position.

Implants are not a necessary component to achieve a satisfactory outcome if existing breast volume is adequate to create a pleasing shape. When breast volume has been greatly diminished, women may choose to have implants placed along with the mastopexy. A plastic surgeon can determine during an initial consultation whether or not a lift by itself can achieve the patient's goal.

A typical breast lift is done on an outpatient basis. Incisions are typically made around the pigmented part surrounding the nipple (the "areola") and often also in the lower part of the breast, removing some of the lower excess skin envelope and excess breast tissue to minimally reduce the breast and allow the breast mound to be repositioned upward. The nipple and areola are then repositioned upward onto the newly shaped breast. If desired, implants can be inserted.

Surgical incisions, and resulting scars, are usually located around the nipple, from the lower center of the areola to the fold beneath the breast, and sometimes within the fold beneath the breast. The extent and location of the scars depends mostly on the size, shape and degree of droopiness of the breasts. All scars improve significantly over 6-12 months.

After surgery patients wear a special bra for 2-3 weeks and can shower after a few days. Discomfort is usually minimal. A typical recovery schedule is: Bruising and swelling, 10-14 days; return to work, 5-10 days. Patients are encouraged to return to normal activity as soon as possible but to avoid any aerobic/strenuous activity for at least 2-3 weeks.

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