

Breast Surgery **Risks and Benefits**

It is important for you to understand the risks and benefits of the surgical procedure that you are considering.

Breast surgery is performed to diagnose an unknown abnormality or remove a potentially harmful disease. It may consist of removal of breast tissue from the size of marble up to and including the entire breast and lymph nodes in the armpit. The scope of breast operations is too broad to discuss here, though we will have discussed it prior to your surgery. If necessary, I will usually refer you to informational literature, and the American Cancer Society can be an invaluable resource. Of course, if undiagnosed or untreated, breast cancer is often a fatal disease. Caught early, it is highly curable with minimal surgery.

Most people worry more about the risk of anesthesia than the procedure itself. General anesthesia is extremely safe nowadays. The risk of death from general anesthesia is less than one in several hundred thousand for healthy patient. Our anesthesiologists are very skilled and equipped with the most up-to-date monitoring devices. Your general medical condition will have the most significant impact on your risk for anesthesia and surgery. Smoking, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes are some of the most common risk enhancers. I will address these concerns with you. If you have specific questions or concerns, please ask. You will also have the opportunity to speak with your anesthesiologist prior to your surgery while you are in the staging area. There'll be a separate anesthesia consent for you to sign. If you have a special request or desire a specific anesthesiologist to perform your anesthesia please let us know a week or more advance.

Any operation can have complications. Fortunately they are not common and usually do not affect the long-term results. The risk of infection following breast surgery is less than 5 percent. The risk of needing a blood transfusion is essentially zero; however, bleeding into the area the wound can occur and is called hematoma. This can occasionally be of such size that it has to be drained to facilitate healing and reduce pain. Also, body fluid (seroma) can accumulate in the area surgery. We usually drain this with a needle until it stops accumulating, but occasionally it can drain on it's own. This may look like blood and be frightening, but you are almost never actively bleeding when this occurs. There is usually no deformity after a breast biopsy, but occasionally there can be some depression of the tissue around the wound. For more extensive breast operations, the extent of deformity is dependent upon the amount of tissue removed. Following mastectomy the wound edges may have impaired blood supply and heal very slowly. There are usually areas of numbness after major breast surgery. There can also be tightening of the shoulder joint if you do not perform your exercises that I will give you after the procedure. Serious arm edema occurs in about 10 percent of patients undergoing removal of all lymph glands in conjunction with breast surgery. If this becomes a problem, I will direct you to those who can help with this problem. Fortunately, there is a newer procedure known as sentinel lymph node biopsy that allows us to remove only a few lymph glands to predict whether or not there is spread of the cancer. All of these issues will be covered with you in detail prior to your operation.

These risks are not meant to be all-inclusive but cover the majority of problems that occur after breast surgery. You will be asked to sign a consent specifying that we have covered these risks and that you agree to the planned surgical procedure. If you have a questions, write them down and please remember to ask before surgery. It is a privilege to be your surgeon and I will do my very best to assure a rapid recovery and an excellent result.

Dr. Mac

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