

BREAST LIFT VS. BREAST REDUCTION:

ONE AND THE SAME OR COMPLETELY DIFFERENT?

By Becky Wiese

Throughout the seasons of a woman's life, her body changes, including the shape of her breasts. These changes can be due to various factors, including pregnancy and breastfeeding, changes in weight, the aging process, heredity, and the work of gravity over time. If a woman desires a more youthful, uplifted profile, a variety of surgical procedures can be considered.

One of the more frequent questions asked of Dr. Chad Tattini, a cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgeon based in Bloomington, is an explanation of the difference between a breast lift and breast reduction, and whether they are the same thing or are completely different.

As it turns out, they aren't the same, but one does involve the other.

According to Dr. Tattini, a breast lift is a purely cosmetic procedure in which the nipples and breasts are lifted to a more anatomically correct position on a woman's torso. This is done by cutting out excess skin, tightening up the breast envelope, and repositioning the breast, with nothing added or taken away from the breast mass itself.

The lift can be classified as a small, medium, or large, which defines the type of incision and subsequent scar that will remain. How much excess skin to be removed determines the category. A small lift leaves a circle scar around the areola, while a medium scar is in the shape of a lollipop: it includes the circle scar, plus a line down the center of the breast to the fold or crease (where the breast tissue meets the chest). A large lift procedure will leave an "anchor" scar, with the circle, the lollipop, and horizontal lines along the contour of the breast to the left and right.

Some of the incisions and resulting scars are naturally concealed within the contour of the breast, but over time, even those that are visible will typically fade.

In Dr. Tattini's experience, the breast lift by itself is not commonly requested by patients. As it is a totally cosmetic procedure, it is generally not covered by insurance. In fact, breast augmentation—a breast lift with an implant—that adds volume to make the breasts fuller is a more common procedure.

Conversely, women who feel their breasts are too big or heavy don't need just a lift; in fact, leaving too much breast tissue would eventually cause the skin to stretch again and not hold the desired result. Instead, these women have more success with a breast reduction.

This surgery involves removing glandular tissue from the inner, outer, and central portions of the breast, in addition to excising the extra skin that remains. A breast reduction will, therefore, have an "anchor" incision. A breast reduction also inherently includes a breast lift because it involves removing the excess skin as well as reducing the size of the breast. The long-term goal is to remove enough breast tissue so that the remaining skin is not at risk for being stretched out over time.

Breast reduction isn't always done for cosmetic reasons. Women who have chronic symptoms such as back and/or neck pain, bra

strap creases, or rashes in the fold (where the breast tissue meets and hangs over the skin of the chest/abdomen) may be able to appeal to their insurance company for coverage of the cost of breast reduction surgery.

"A breast reduction also inherently includes a breast lift because it involves removing the excess skin as well as reducing the size of the breast."

The insurance company will take height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) into consideration and determine a minimum amount of tissue that the surgeon would have to remove. If the surgeon and the patient agree to this amount, insurance covers the cost. However, if the numbers determined by the insurance company require an amount that is more than the patient wants to remove, the procedure would have to be cosmetic rather than reconstructive.

Regardless of whether it's done for cosmetic or reconstructive reasons, breast reduction surgeries are quite common, usually one of the top 5 surgeries performed every year. And for good reason. "Breast reduction patients are often our happiest patients," says Dr. Tattini. "They not only feel better about how they look, they just feel better overall."

As with most other surgical procedures performed by Dr. Tattini, both the breast lift and breast reduction surgeries include proactive pain management. Patients receive a regimen of pain medications before, during, and after surgery to minimize pain. Most patients actually feel less pain than they expect, often experiencing more discomfort than pain, and typically can wean themselves to extra-strength Tylenol in just a few days.

Patients can return to their baseline activities in about four weeks, and the final result will be realized about three months after surgery.

If you're interested in finding out more about breast lift and/or breast reduction surgery, view the gallery on his website, chadtattinimd.com, or contact his office at (309) 664-1007 or chadtattinimd.com/contact. He currently operates in the comfort and privacy of his new office, located at 902 N. Hershey Rd.