



Catholic Healthcare West

Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

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Q: I was recently diagnosed with breast cancer and have been scheduled for surgery. I just heard about a skin-sparing mastectomy. Can you tell me what that is and who is a candidate for this?

A: A skin-sparing mastectomy is a procedure performed on women in the early stages of breast cancer. Like a mastectomy, a skin-sparing mastectomy removes all of the breast tissue, including the areola and nipple. A surgeon will save the skin envelope so breast reconstruction can be performed immediately after the removal of the tumor with the breast tissue.

A plastic surgeon uses the envelope of skin remaining to insert a saline implant or tissue from another part of the body. You truly have a better cosmetic outcome as a result of this procedure, hence both mastectomy and re construction are done simultaneously.

According to breastcancer.org, almost all women are eligible for skin-sparing mastectomies; however there are a few exceptions:

- **A skin-sparing mastectomy is not usually performed if you've decided that you will not have immediate breast reconstruction.** If you won't be having immediate breast reconstruction at the time of your mastectomy, your surgeon will most likely remove as much skin as is required to make your scar and the surface of your chest flat.
- **A skin-sparing mastectomy is not safe if there is a possibility that tumor cells are close to the skin.** If there's any question that the tumor may involve the skin, such as in inflammatory breast cancer, then skin-sparing mastectomy is not an option.
- **A skin-sparing mastectomy is not for patients that have had radiation in the past for the treatment of breast cancer.** Radiation therapy is a contraindication, however, each case is evaluated on an individual basis.

Women'shealthzone.net reports that thanks to early detection, between 70 and 75 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer today are possible candidates for lumpectomy or other breast-conserving surgery. Women with risk factors, family history and multiple breast tumors, however, may elect to have a skin-sparing mastectomy instead of breast conserving surgery.

Please discuss your options with your doctor to learn more and to determine if you're a candidate for a skin-sparing mastectomy.

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