



What to expect after tissue expander/implant reconstruction:

Expansion of your implants will begin around 2-3 weeks after surgery once the drains have been removed and the skin appears healed. If you plan to undergo additional treatment after surgery, we will continue expansions through chemotherapy but not radiation therapy. Future surgeries take place after chemotherapy and radiation therapy are completed.

Once you begin expansions, you can continue with expansions weekly until you reach your desired size. The number of expansions needed depends on how much volume we are able to add at the time of your initial reconstruction and how large you desire to be; at each visit, we will add 50-60 ml of fluid. In some cases, limitations due to skin may dictate your ability to continue with expansion, and we will discuss that as the process proceeds.

At each expansion visit, the port will be located and saline will be injected into the implant using a small needle. Most commonly, the area is numb and you will not feel the needle stick. You may feel a sensation of stretching or pressure after expansion, but this usually lasts only a few days. If you do have pain, over the counter pain medication, such as Ibuprofen (Advil), can be used. Expansions generally take around 2 months to complete.

After expansions are completed, the expander or implant will be exchanged for your permanent implant, which can be either silicone or saline. This procedure usually occurs, at minimum, 3 months after your mastectomy. Exchange surgery is a same day surgery procedure, and is generally very well tolerated; recovery time is usually around 2-3 days. If you are undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy, surgery will occur after the completion of these therapies. This surgical procedure is carried out through the previous mastectomy scar, so no additional scars will be created.

If you have an adjustable implant, exchange surgery is not always necessary if you are happy with your initial cosmetic outcome; instead of exchange, your ports can simply be removed, either in the office or in the operating room. Oftentimes, this can be combined with nipple reconstruction (if applicable).

Nipple reconstruction is carried out with local skin from the breast usually around 3 months after your last surgery. An area of skin is elevated and sutured together to create a nipple mound. This can be done in the office or the operating room depending on your wishes and your desire for any additional procedures. Reconstructed nipples tend to flatten over time. Three months after nipple reconstruction, the areola and nipple tattoo can be placed. This is an in office procedure. Tattoos start out darker and gradually fade; touch ups are sometimes required.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call or email us. Additionally, frequently asked questions and answers can be found on the website under "F.A.Q.". We look forward to seeing you in the office!