

Aesthetic breast-shaping surgery: What you should know and expect

THE GLOBE AND MAIL



Breast implants are one option for surgical reshaping.

If you are like most women who decide to get cosmetic breast-shaping surgery, you have spent a considerable amount of time reaching your decision. You've considered the pros and cons – and sought information to help you determine what kind of results you want from the surgery, what the potential risks might be; and how much time you will need to recover afterwards.

By the time you book a consultation with a plastic surgeon, you no doubt have a general understanding of what lies ahead, but you now need an expert to guide you through your personal journey.

Dr. Julie Khanna has provided such guidance to thousands of women in over 21 years of practising aesthetic plastic surgery in Oakville, Ontario. She is also the past president of the Canadian Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (CSAPS).

Khanna urges women considering breast implants and other procedures to educate themselves with online research, using authoritative websites such as the CSAPS site and those of the U.S. medical societies. These sources can guide you to choosing the right physician, she says.

"First of all, you need to choose a plastic surgery specialist certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, who is operating in an accredited surgical facility," says Khanna.

She recommends checking out more than one specialist and to make sure you feel comfortable with everything – "that you connect well with the physician, the staff and the whole environment."

"It is important to remember that breast augmentation is a lifetime procedure," she says. "Our bodies change: we age, we might have children and breastfeed – we gain and lose weight. You will need repeat surgery and you must recognize this is a long-term relationship."

Khanna believes it is critical for her to look beyond the surgical procedure to the patient as a whole, to understand her needs and match them to a surgical option that is appropriate to her lifestyle and desired outcomes.

The majority of her patients fall into two main groups: young women in their early twenties who feel underdeveloped or mismatched to their bodies, and those who have had children (and typically have breastfed) and found that their breasts have changed more dramatically than they expected.

"I also see women who are 50 or older, who may be experiencing a life change, such as a change in marital status or their children leaving the nest, and they're saying, 'Maybe I can do something for myself now.'"

After taking a medical history and family medical history, and doing a physical exam, Khanna begins the discussion about what would be the right breast surgery for that patient. "I tell them the best long-term result is one that respects their body and is proportionate – a natural-looking breast that is appropriate to their height, weight and anatomy. That will mean fewer complications and a reduced likelihood of an early repeat surgery.

"Of course, we also have to take into account the patient's desires and we do have some leeway within the proportionality requirement."

For women who opt for breast implants, the two main options are saline implants or cohesive silicone gel implants. Both are good, she says, but she uses gel implants more frequently, saying "they tend to feel softer and more natural."

Before choosing the appropriate approach, Khanna shows the patient photographs to get a sense of the results they are seeking.

"We also have the technology to produce 3D imaging for all our patients," she says. "We can actually take a picture of you and add enhancements to the image, to give you a preview of what it can look like."

Those women looking for a smaller amount of added breast volume or reshaping may choose a fat transfer procedure, in which the surgeon takes fat from another area of the patient's body, processes it and transfers it to the breasts. This approach may also result in body contouring for the area, such as the abdomen or thighs, from which the fat is taken.

Khanna ensures she answers all questions of concern to her patients and advises them of potential risks. Problems are rare, but she explains that risks include those associated with surgery in general, including nausea and vomiting from general anesthesia and the risk of infection. There are specific risks associated with breast implants and you should discuss these in detail with your surgeon.

What can you expect on the day of the surgery and how long will you need to recover?

"On average, the procedure takes 25 minutes," Khanna says. "You have to avoid heavy exercise or lifting for four weeks, but following surgery most of my patients are mobile and resuming normal activity within a day."