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Empowering Breast Cancer Survivors From Day One

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR BREAST SURGEON

***Note: Information provided on this sheet does not constitute medical or legal advice. Always consult with your medical care team. This compilation of questions is not comprehensive and is only meant for educational purposes. The below questions have been compiled from Online resources such as cancer.net, breastcancer.org, and from those diagnosed with breast cancer in our survivingbreastcancer.org community. If you would like to add to this list, please contact info@survivingbreastcancer.org.

Questions About Your Surgeon

- Are you board-certified?
- Do you specialize in this type of surgery?
- How many operations like the one I am considering have you performed?

Questions to Ask Before Surgery:

- Do I need any other tests before this surgery?
- Am I a candidate for a lumpectomy?
- Am I a candidate for a nipple sparing surgery
- If I have a choice between a lumpectomy or a mastectomy, what are the pros and cons of each option in my case?
- What is the best possible outcome from my surgery?
- What is the worst case scenario from this type of surgery?

Questions to ask your Surgeon About Lymph Nodes



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- Do the lymph nodes in my underarm need to be removed?
- What is a sentinel lymph node biopsy? What are the benefits and risks? Would you recommend it for me?
- What is the risk of lymphedema with a sentinel lymph node biopsy? What is the risk of lymphedema with axillary lymph node dissection?
- What should I know about taking care of my arm after lymph node dissection?
- What is the benefit of having more lymph nodes removed?
- What are the side effects of these procedures? Can they be prevented or minimized?

Questions to ask your Surgeon About your Breast Cancer Treatment Plan

- Should I consider chemotherapy before surgery?
- Will radiation after surgery affect my reconstruction options?
- Will radiation affect the aesthetical outcome of my surgery? (i.e. will my breast change size?)

Questions to ask About Surgery Options

- When do I need to make a decision about surgery?
- What are the risks if I decide not to have this surgery?
- Will my tumor be saved? Where will it be stored? For how long? How can it be accessed in the future?
- If I need a mastectomy, is reconstruction (plastic surgery) an option for me? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What types of breast reconstruction surgery am I eligible for?
 - Fat Grafting/ autologous fat transfer vs implants vs. opting for going flat and no reconstruction (aesthetically flat closure)



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- If I chose to have implants, are there different types of implants to choose from? How do I decide which implant is best for me?
- What are the potential risks and side effects of this operation?
- Do I need to consult a plastic surgeon about reconstruction options? Can you help me arrange that?
- How many surgeries will be involved?
- Will I need expanders? Can you explain to me what they are and for how long I will have them?
- Am I eligible to have one surgery where you remove the tumor and can go direct to implant? What are the pros and cons?
- If I have a mastectomy without reconstruction, where can I get a prosthesis? Is this covered by my insurance?
- Will there be permanent effects from the surgery?
- Should I get a second opinion? How do I go about doing that?

Questions about the Surgery Itself

- How long is the procedure? How long will I stay in the hospital?
- What type of anesthesia will I need for this operation?
- What medications and supplements should I stop taking? Should I stop taking hormone replacement therapy? What about birth control pills?
- What are the possible complications for this type of surgery? How would I know if there is a problem?
- Will my medical insurance cover all charges from you and the hospital?

Questions about Recovery



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- How long will it take me to recover after the surgery? What should I expect the first day, first week, first month?
- What kind of pain will I be in afterwards? How do you help me manage my pain?
- What risks or side effects of this surgery do I need to know about? i.e., pain, tenderness, bruising, scarring, numbness? Which ones do I need to report to you? Will any of the side effects be long-term? Is there anything I can do to reduce side effects?
- When should I call your office if I experience any side effects?
- Will the hospital provide a home nurse to help change my bandages? How will this be arranged?
- Will I have stitches, staples, and/or bandages?
- Will I need to have surgical drains? How do I clean the drains? How long will the surgical drains be in?
- What kind of care will my incision need after surgery?
- Is there anything I can do before surgery to help the healing process after surgery?
- When can I shower or bathe?
- Where will the scar be, and what will it look like? Can you draw me a picture so I can better understand?
- What will my breasts look and feel like after surgery?
- What type of clothes should I bring to go home in? Will I need a special type of bra?
- When will I need to return for a follow-up appointment?
- When will I find out the results of the surgery? Who will discuss the pathology report with me? Will it be in person or by phone?
- Will my arm be affected by surgery? For how long? Will I need physical therapy for my arm?



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- Are there physical therapy exercises I should do after surgery? When can I start exercising again?
- Are there any activities I should avoid and for how long?
- When can I start to treat my scar on my own? Do you recommend special creams or lotions?
- When can I return to work and other daily activities?

Questions to ask About the Day of Surgery

- What should I do to get ready for the operation? Do you have recommendations on how to help me relax before surgery?
- What can I expect as part of the pre-op? Does that happen the same day of the surgery or prior?

Questions to ask your breast surgeon after your first surgery

- What is the size of the tumor?
- What is the grade and stage of this disease? What are my biomarkers? What do these mean?
- What are the chances that the breast cancer will return?
- Will I need chemotherapy? Am I eligible for the Oncotype DX or Mammoprint?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Can I get a copy of my pathology report?
- Was all of the cancer removed during the surgery? Do I have clear margins?
- How many lymph nodes were removed?
- Has the cancer spread to any of the lymph nodes? If so, how many? Has the cancer spread to anywhere else in my body?
- Do I need additional surgery?
- Are there additional tests you recommend?



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- How often do you and I meet for follow ups?