

communication aids results

Sydney plastic surgeon **Dr Ben Norris** says good communication helps achieve the breast surgery results women want. Christine Doggett reports.

According to Sydney plastic surgeon Dr Ben Norris, whether you want a breast lift, a reduction or implants to augment your breasts and your confidence, expectations can only be satisfied with attentiveness and discussion between patients and surgeons.

'At our first consultation, I want my patient to voice what she likes and dislikes about her breasts,' says Dr Norris. 'As a surgeon, it's imperative that I have good listening and communication skills and that I'm able to read both verbal and non-verbal cues. Generally more than one consultation is necessary and in fact, the surgeon should consult with the patient as many times as needed, and the process should not be rushed. When a patient is comfortable, she should be able to voice any concerns she has in a professional environment, knowing that she will be treated in a discrete, non-judgmental manner.'

According to Dr Norris, it is important to find out what the patient expects to achieve and how she thinks improving her breasts will impact or change her life. 'For example, I would be wary if a woman had the expectation that a breast reduction might improve her relationship with her partner,' he says.

Breast reduction surgery is designed to remove the excessive weight of the breasts and lift sagging breasts. Overly large breasts are a problem for both young and middle-aged women because of discomfort and sagging along with back, neck and shoulder pain. In a breast lift the nipple is relocated to a higher position, the breast tissue is repositioned to a higher level, excess skin is removed from the lower portion of the breast and the remaining breast skin is reshaped. It is possible to enlarge the breasts at the same time as uplifting them, by placing an implant behind the breast tissue. It is also possible to either reduce the amount of breast tissue or keep the same breast volume.

In fact, Dr Norris encourages the patient to bring a friend, relative or partner to the consultations if she wishes. 'The other person often retains a lot of the information



too, allowing them to discuss what they've heard between consultations,' he says. 'This often helps in the decision making process.'

Dr Norris also suggests his patients bring pictures from magazines or the internet to show what they like or dislike. 'I can then determine what is 'realistic' in terms of expectations,' he says. 'I show the patient honest, untouched before and after photographs of my own work, including photos of the breasts six weeks after the operation, showing scar placement and healing.'

Patients should always choose an appropriately trained surgeon when considering any form of breast surgery – one with technical competence and artistic skills. 'The patient should feel comfortable with the surgeon, and actually like the doctor and feel that she is being treated very individually,' Dr Norris explains. 'In the case of breast augmentation, the surgeon, rather than a member of his staff, should discuss the implants with the patient. There is considerable choice with respect to implant filler, shape and position and incision site, and the operation is customised to meet the patient's specific needs and circumstances.'

Breast augmentation is performed to enlarge and improve the shape of small, underdeveloped or post-childbirth breasts. For a natural-looking result in breast augmentation surgery, it is essential that the surgeon has a keen artistic eye to balance the patient's proportions so that her final breast size and shape complement her body shape.

Breast lift surgery, or mastopexy, is designed for women who have saggy breasts, usually resulting either from breastfeeding or losing a lot of weight. In the procedure the breasts are raised and recontoured, and the nipple is elevated so it sits in a higher position on the breast mound. If the breasts sag or if improvement in volume is also desired, a breast lift may be combined with an augmentation, using implants to enhance the result.

Dr Norris gives sample implants to his patients to take home and trial in the privacy of their own homes. Implants are placed inside a bra, preferably a sports bra with no under-wiring, and can then be assessed under the woman's own clothes. These implant trials give patients a good idea of the shape and volume achievable.

Presenting all the possible options and informing the patient of what to expect both in the short and long terms, Dr Norris views the surgeon/patient relationship as an ongoing one. 'Good communication doesn't stop when the operation has been completed,' he says. 'I am happy to see the patient after the procedure as often as she wishes.' **acsm**



BEFORE AFTER breast augmentation by Dr Norris



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