

ATLANTA BLACK STAR

Breast Reduction Surgery Is Common — But Here Are the Risk Factors Women Should Know

Taayoo Murray | March 27, 2024

Breast reduction surgery is not the most-talked-about form of plastic surgery that occurs today. However, it's very common, with around 90,000 of these surgeries performed each year in the United States.

While it can understandably be a private matter, many celebrities like Queen Latifah and Sunny Hostin have revealed that they underwent breast reduction surgery. Queen Latifah shared that her kickboxing workouts were difficult with her DD breast size. Hostin said she made her decision after years of struggling with back pain and body-image issues.

However, Blac Chyna made waves in January when she shared that she developed complications from her breast reduction surgery.

We spoke with medical experts to understand what women need to know if they're considering the procedure.



Queen Latifah at the 55th NAACP Image Awards held at The Shrine Auditorium on March 16, 2024, in Los Angeles, California.
(Photo by John Salangsang/Variety via Getty Images)

Reasons for getting a breast reduction

Breast reductions are usually sought for a combination of reasons. Physical pain is typically the most common complaint.

“Heavy pendulous breasts cause neck and back pain,” Dr. Steven Williams, president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, told Atlanta Black Star. “That weight can also trigger other symptoms like migraines.”

Williams went on to explain that patients can also get significant rashes in the folds of heavy breasts. Some women may even experience skin inflammation in the fold below the breast due to excessive moisture and contact.

“Large breasts can restrict physical activities, leading women to desire a reduction in breast size to improve mobility and comfort,” said Dr. Nicholas Jones, an Atlanta-based plastic surgeon.

Amber Rose, Queen Latifah, and Sherri Shepherd all noted physical discomfort and their inability to comfortably carry out regular tasks as their main reason for doing the procedure. Shepherd jokingly said that she just wanted to experience sleeping on her stomach.

Jones also explained that breast reductions can make the breasts more symmetrical, restore shape after aging or childbearing years, and improve shape and nipple position on the breast mound.

Risk factors to consider

Every surgical procedure carries some amount of risk. Breast reduction surgery is no different.

“It’s important that patients are close to their ideal body weight, have stopped smoking, and are in general good health,” Williams said. Smoking increases the risk of complications during and after surgery, including impaired wound healing and increased risk of infection.

“Obesity is associated with a higher risk of surgical complications, including wound healing issues and increased anesthesia risks,” Jones said. “Some surgeons may advise weight loss before surgery to optimize outcomes.”

Advanced age may be associated with increased surgical risks due to factors such as decreased skin elasticity and slower wound healing. However, age alone does not necessarily preclude breast reduction surgery.

Certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and autoimmune disorders, can increase the risk of complications during surgery and affect healing postoperatively.

Jones also noted that previous breast surgeries or medical procedures may impact the surgical approach and increase the complexity of breast reduction surgery.

What can go wrong?

The most common complications from breast reduction include delayed wound healing, fluid collections, or changes in nipple sensitivity. Other risks include bleeding, infection, scarring, or the need for further surgery or revisions.

Infection at the surgical site is a potential complication, but it's relatively rare when a patient receives proper preoperative preparation and postoperative care. Furthermore, breast reduction surgery requires general anesthesia, and there are general risks associated with that.

Jones advised that patients be aware of the possibility of the following complications.

Scarring: A scar is inevitable, as most techniques require a scar to be placed on a visible portion of the breasts. Patients can also develop hypertrophic or keloid scars. The incidence of keloid scarring in Black and Hispanic individuals is as high as 16 percent.

Asymmetry: Despite the surgeon's best efforts, slight asymmetry in breast size or shape may occur following breast reduction surgery.

Hematoma: Bleeding underneath the skin or in the flap can cause blood to collect. This can lead to a hematoma that may require a return trip to the operating room.

Loss of breastfeeding ability: Breast reduction surgery can affect the ability to breastfeed, although this varies depending on the surgical technique used and individual factors.

Changes in sensation: Temporary or permanent changes in nipple sensation, including numbness or hypersensitivity, may occur after breast reduction surgery.

Other things to know

"Patients should always seek consultation with their plastic surgeon to evaluate whether they are a good candidate for this procedure," said Dr. Ahmed Nasser, a New Jersey-based plastic surgeon. "For the right patient, this can be a life-changing procedure improving their quality of life tremendously."

Like other plastic surgery procedures, the price can vary greatly. The average cost of breast reduction surgery is nearly \$6,800, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, but that does not include related expenses such as fees charged for operating room facilities and anesthesia. Plus, the surgeon's experience level and geographic location factor into the varying costs that patients might face.

Breast reduction surgery costs may be covered by health insurance if it is deemed medically necessary to alleviate physical symptoms. Patients should check with their insurance provider to determine coverage eligibility and requirements.

This surgery also requires a significant period of recovery in most cases, during which patients may experience temporary discomfort, swelling, and bruising.

Sunny Hostin shared that her postoperative period was not glamorous: A two-week-long recovery at home that included drainage tubes for three days to prevent blood and fluid buildup.

Following the surgeon's post-op instructions and attending follow-up appointments are essential for optimal healing and outcomes.

Jones advised that patients should have realistic expectations about the outcomes of breast reduction surgery. There is a risk of potential scarring and changes in breast sensation. Open communication with the surgeon about desired outcomes and concerns is crucial.

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