

## Fat transfer breast

### What is fat transfer?

Fat transfer is a dynamic procedure which has gained immense popularity for correcting contour defects in various parts of the body. The technique involves aspirating fat through special small diameter cannulae. The fat is then treated to remove oil and excess water. This leaves concentrated fat cells which are gently re-injected to fill out the desired area.

The whole concept is based on 'structural fat grafting'. Fat cells injected by this special method lie in different tissue planes and are able to get an individual blood supply. The end result is that the fat injected persists long term. It is estimated that about 50% of the fat injected survives long term and we overcompensate at the initial surgery, anticipating the loss. However, top up procedures may be necessary.

The additional benefit of fat transfer is the therapeutic effect of stem cells which are present in fat cells. This has an emerging role in tissue regeneration and wound healing. Breast lipofilling, can not only fill defects and improve contour, but also regenerates skin to give a more youthful appearance. Fat transfer in irradiated breasts can also improve the side effects of radiotherapy.

### What does the surgery involve?

The procedure is normally carried out under general anaesthetic and takes about 2 hours to perform. Fat is aspirated using fine metal cannulae of different sizes. The tiny incisions are closed with a single stitch; which is covered by a small waterproof dressing.

The fat is then centrifuged and injected into the area of interest. This process is time consuming and relies on delicate fat handling and careful reinjection. You will feel quite bruised and swollen after the operation but this will settle over 1 -2 weeks. The hospital stay is conventionally 1 day but this depends on your recovery and additional procedures.

### What are the risks and side effects of surgery?

Complications are infrequent and usually minor. However, no surgery is without risk and it is important that you are given a clear picture.

There will be some discomfort for the first day. Occasionally bruising may occur, but this should resolve rapidly.

There is always some **scarring** where the tiny incisions are made. However, the scars are made in the small skin folds or creases so that they are almost invisible. In extremely rare cases these scars can thicken and become red.

With all surgery, there is a risk of **bleeding**, either during the operation or afterwards. However, if this does occur it is unlikely to require any further surgery. There is also a very slight risk of **infection** - again, this is very uncommon.

If some of the fat does not gain a blood supply it will die and gradually be reabsorbed. This can sometimes leave a lump that cannot be seen but can be felt (**fat necrosis**).

**Further** fat grafting procedures may be required to give the desired result.

All the risks will be discussed in detail at your consultation. However, if you have further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to discuss these with your surgeon. Decisions about cosmetic surgery should never be rushed.

### **How do I prepare for surgery?**

Following your consultation, if you decide to proceed with surgery, a range of dates will be offered for your operation and you will be asked to choose the one that suits you best.

You will be admitted to the hospital on the day of your operation. If you are having a general anaesthetic, you will be asked not to eat anything six hours before surgery. Black tea/coffee or non-fizzy drinks (nothing containing milk) can be taken up to two hours before surgery. Chewing gum should also be avoided six hours before your operation. If you are having a small amount of fat injected under local anaesthetic, then there is no need to abstain from eating or drinking.

It is important to inform your surgeon, anaesthetist and nurse of any medicines (self or GP prescribed) or recreational drugs you take. Medicines containing aspirin should be avoided for two weeks before the operation since they increase the risk of bleeding during surgery. If there are any other medications that may affect surgery then this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

If you smoke, you should consider giving up six weeks before your operation. The longer you give up beforehand, the better. Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen in the blood, which is bad for wound healing. If you can't stop completely, cutting down will help.

### **What happens after the operation?**

At the end of the procedure, a light dressing may be applied.

As long as you are feeling well after the operation, you will be able to go home the same or the following day. You will not be able to drive yourself home from hospital, so it is often a good idea to get a friend to drive you.

Before you leave the hospital, a follow up appointment will be booked at a time convenient for you.

**What is the estimated time for recovery, absence from work and return to usual activities?**

Recovery times vary from one person to another so use the times given below as a guide only. They apply to a large area of fat grafting. Obviously for smaller areas under local anaesthetic then recovery is much sooner and you can probably return to work as soon as you feel ready. If you have any concerns during this period, do contact the hospital team for advice. In the first two days after your operation, it is important for you to be out of bed and walking every two hours during the day and early evening. Staying in bed too long increases your chances of developing clots in the legs. Gradually increase your activity over the next few days.

<b>Fat grafting post surgery timeline</b>			
<b>Day 1 to 7</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>3 to 6 weeks</b>	<b>3 to 6 months</b>
<p>You may have some discomfort for a week. Mild painkillers will help with this but avoid taking aspirin.</p> <p>Keep walking around to avoid post operative complications.</p> <p>Depending on your job, should be able to return to work from 1 week.</p>	<p>Any non dissolvable stitches would be removed.</p> <p>Gradually begin to increase your activity.</p> <p>Drive only when you feel safe.</p>	<p>Avoid lifting or pushing anything heavy for at least three weeks.</p> <p>Area begins to soften and swelling or bruising have almost resolved.</p>	<p>Scars will begin to soften and fade.</p> <p>Can start to judge the result.</p>