

BREAST CANCER: Modified Radical Mastectomy

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

Modified radical mastectomy means the removal of the entire breast and the lymph nodes in the *axilla* (armpit). No muscles are removed (Fig. 1). (The operation in which muscle tissue is removed is called a *radical mastectomy*.) This operation of modified radical mastectomy is done to remove cancer that cannot be removed safely by a smaller operation, such as a *lumpectomy* (also known as *wide local excision*).

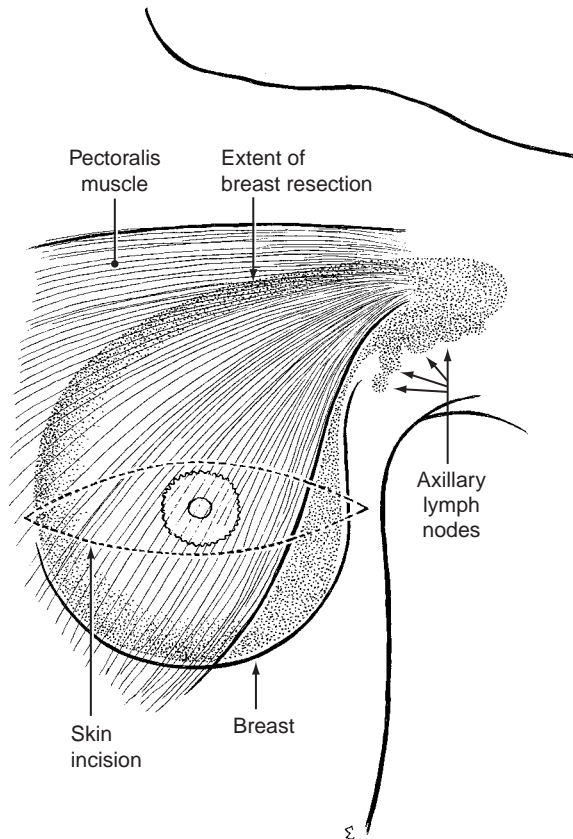


Figure 1. In a modified radical mastectomy, all the breast tissue and the lymph nodes in the axilla (armpit) are removed. The pectoral muscles (the “pecs”) deep to the breast are not disturbed. A common type of skin incision is shown.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- A lump is felt by the person just by chance while dressing or taking a shower or by the doctor doing a routine examination.
- There is a vague aching over the area.
- There is dimpling of the skin, or the breast is slightly flattened over the area.

DIAGNOSIS

A biopsy will have been done by removing a small piece of breast tissue with a fine needle or possibly an open incision. Or, it may be agreed that the biopsy will be done while you are asleep under anesthesia. If the

diagnosis is cancer, then the operation can be done at the same time.

○ TREATMENT

- The best chance to cure a cancer of the breast such as you have is by an operation, often followed by additional medical treatment.

There are several operations for breast cancer. Findings that indicate a modified radical mastectomy is appropriate include the following:

- There may be very little to feel, but the mammogram shows areas suspicious for cancer throughout the breast.
- A generous open biopsy is done, but under the microscope it can be seen that the tumor extends across all the margins of the biopsy specimen.
- The breast is small, and doing a lumpectomy to remove a fair-sized cancer to include normal tissue around the tumor doesn't leave much behind. Also, the tissue remaining has to receive x-ray treatments for 5 to 6 weeks.

After careful consideration of all factors, the recommendation is that you have a modified radical mastectomy.

PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION

- An examination of your blood, urine, heart (EKG), and lungs (chest x-ray) will be done.
- A bone scan may be done to be certain there is nothing abnormal.
- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the operation.
- Shower as usual the morning of the operation.
- You may be given medicine that will make you feel drowsy before you are brought to the operating room.

□ OPERATION

- You will be asleep for the operation.
- The operation usually takes about 2 hours.
- You will not receive a blood transfusion.
- The removed breast and lymph nodes will be sent to the laboratory to be examined by a pathologist.

POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- You will wake up in a recovery room. When your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing become stable, you will be taken to a regular hospital room.
- There will be a thin plastic tube coming from the wound that will drain any fluid into a small plastic bag.
- There is only moderate pain, and it will be controlled with medicine.
- The evening of the operation you will be helped to sit up and on the next day to get out of bed.
- You will be shown how to manage the thin plastic tube and its container; it's not difficult.

- You should be able to go home in several days.
- Your cancer can be cured. The chances of this can be estimated only after all the laboratory tests are back.
- Arrangements will be made for your follow-up office visit, pain medicine, stitch and tube removal, instructions on arm exercises, and discussion of the laboratory findings.
- As with any operation, complications are always possible. With this type of operation, they can include bleeding, infection, loss of some skin, arm swelling, and possibly others.

✚ HOME CARE

- You may walk about as you wish, even climb stairs.
- You may eat as you did before the operation.
- You will be given instructions on how to take care of the drainage bag; it's not difficult.
- Sponge bathe as you wish. After the first change of dressings, you may shower as you wish and with any dressings on or off.
 - When taking a shower, the small plastic bag for the draining fluid can be strapped around your waist or hung around your neck with a string.
 - There may be narrow strips of tape across the incision. It's all right if they get wet; they will be removed in the doctor's office.
 - After you dry yourself, replace any dressings with clean, dry ones.
- Arrangements can be made for a home visiting nurse if one is needed.
- Even though many of the lymph nodes were removed, enough of them remain in other parts of

the axilla and above the collar bone to drain the arm under normal circumstances. Just the same, those that remain should not be abused if they are to do their job properly. They can be hurt by the following:

- Infection: You should avoid injury to that arm, such as dirty scratches, splinters, and even needle sticks to draw blood.
- X-rays to the axilla. You will not receive any x-ray treatments to your axilla.
- Repeated hard work with that arm for long periods of time (examples: using that arm to pull weeds for an hour or two, to vacuum your entire house, or to wash all the windows in one session).
- Occasionally there will be some swelling of the hand or forearm. There are treatments for this.
- Driving a car with an automatic shift may not seem too demanding. However, you may have to slam on brakes or twist to turn the steering wheel and may strain your sutures or tear something. During your follow-up visit, let's discuss when you can resume driving.
- You may resume sexual activity whenever you choose.
- You may return to work when you feel up to it, but let's talk about it first during your follow-up office visit.

📞 CALL OUR OFFICE IF

- Your incision area becomes red or swollen, or there is drainage from it.
- The area in the axilla becomes swollen.
- Your hand or arm becomes swollen.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.