

Do These Boobs go with This Outfit?

Exploration into the world of breast prostheses...

By Katelyn Carey, BSN, RN

When I first had my mastectomy, I initially chose to do a reconstruction. That reconstruction wasn't exactly an instant transformation from old breasts to new ones. There was a sock phase first, in which (yes) I actually did use socks to round out my weird shaped mid-construction new foobs. Like so many women, I didn't know that actually getting breast forms was an option to help me through this awkward phase.

But let me back up, foobs? I got this term from other mastectomy patients. There's something almost nobody mentions at the beginning of a surgery- whether you choose reconstruction or not, **your new chest will not feel at all the same**. Sometimes, it doesn't feel at all- because damaged nerves create numb areas. My newly reconstructed breasts didn't feel like my breasts. They didn't really even feel like part of my body. The term foobs (fake boobs) felt appropriate.

About 12 years after my reconstruction I was no longer struggling with body image, but I was struggling with pain issues related to scar tissue and the way the implants interacted with my muscle movements. So I deconstructed my reconstruction.

I kept my old implants as a souvenir. My children once used them to bomb a lego village. They caused mass destruction...they were really heavy.

Now I'm flat chested- and the world is filled with prostheses options. Some of those options are way cooler than I ever would have guessed.

Just like most states in the US require insurance companies to cover reconstruction, they are also required to cover different types of prostheses (and the specialized bras to hold them) for those who choose not to go through surgical reconstruction. For the best information on what your insurance company might cover, and what different types of prostheses might work well for you, there are experts on this!

Mastectomy Fitters are specially trained people who can run the insurance numbers for you and help you to choose the type of external prostheses that work well for your body and your specifications. Some are completely sealed into a single unit if you want to go swimming without your boobs doing a sponge impression. Some are made to be especially lightweight. Here's a quick introduction to the basics, and



My husband helping me try out my new customs...

some of my favorites.

I want to start by giving an honorable mention to the community minded (and crazy lightweight) prostheses that is... crochet. You can actually find "knitted knockers", or "crochet boobs" online, both patterns and completed versions (try Etsy), for less than \$20. One Etsy customer wrote in her review "I had to go and change the thin shirt I was wearing, it looked like I had the breasts of an 18-year-old".

You may assume she had the version that included the nipples *grin*. For light-weight, cheap and breathable? These are actually a fun option to keep in the closet, and they can be placed in regular bras or the pockets of mastectomy bras. Also, **friends love having something concrete and real that they can do to help** when someone they know is facing something challenging like cancer.

Ok- now a few words about what kind of cool things you will find at a

Mastectomy Apparel shop. This can include clothing (from bras, to swimsuits) that work with mastectomy forms/prostheses.

There are so many options. For realistic weight and feel the silicone breast forms are great. For lightweight or mid-surgery options, forms can also be made from foam, polyurethane, polyester or other materials. There are options with flat backs, options with stuff-able backs to adjust size, and options with moldable backs to accommodate for an uneven chest wall. Over time you can accumulate many different options (including some cheater ones that I'll cover in an attached resource).

Prostheses come in different shapes ranging from oval, to round, to teardrop. The sizes vary to match with your body type or with a remaining breast. At this point I have about 6 different options from 3 of the different companies (ABC, Trulife & Amoena) in my closet, and I truly do match my boobs to my mood or to what looks best with the outfit (different necklines, different straps, different sizes).

Mastectomy fitters can help you try on and learn about different types, from stock to custom. For years I only had stock varieties and they worked great. But I am only partly kidding when I say that if my house is ever on fire my new customs (from ABC-American Breast Care) are one of the things I'm grabbing to take to safety.

Custom forms are matched to your skin tone and molded to your chest wall, so even if you're lumpy like me they still move with you. I honestly sometimes forget I don't have breasts when I'm wearing

Prosthesis examples:

1. "Knitted Knocker"
2. Layered prosthesis with concave back (by TruLife)
3. Traditional silicone prosthesis- with conformable back (by ABC)



them. They're a great option, and are often covered by insurance.

The best advice I can give you is- make use of your experts. Find your local Mastectomy Boutique/Apparel shop and let them help. This can even be done

before surgery to help you better grasp what your options are. These special places frequently also have support items like compression sleeves for lymphedema and wigs.

A wide variety of helpful supplies, matched with the kind hearts and knowledge of the folks that work there? A priceless resource.

For additional information on prostheses, you can open this link to an article from Johns Hopkins.



For information on prostheses & ways to look and feel good again after a mastectomy, scan here (YouTube page with free videos):



Search "Mastectomy Apparel, Mastectomy Bras, or Mastectomy Shop near me" for local shops; call and ask to be scheduled with a certified fitter.

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Writer Katelyn Carey is a nurse educator and author who specializes in trauma-based communication and education. Using cognitive science and 20 years experience in ER, Hospice, and acute care, Katelyn teaches communication strategies and recovery tools that are research based and trauma informed.

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