

How do yours measure up?

Thinking of boosting your bust? You're not alone; last year over a quarter of cosmetic surgery procedures were breast augmentations. Amy Lindsay guides you through the finer points...

When you think of breast enlargement surgery, images of buxom blonde glamour models might spring to mind.

But the women who grace the pages of the tabloids actually represent a false image of the real women who are undertaking breast augmentations.

Breast augmentation – specifically breast enlargement – is still the most popular cosmetic surgery procedure for the average British woman. Of the 26,469 procedures carried out on women by BAAPS practitioners in 2006, 6,156 of these were breast augmentations.

The majority of these patients are ordinary women with everyday reasons for wanting to improve the appearance of their breasts and boost their femininity.

IT'S IN YOUR GENES

While the size of breasts is genetically determined, once developed, a number of factors may cause the breasts to fluctuate in size. When someone loses a great deal of weight, the breast fat will also disappear so women may find themselves losing a cup size.

Post-pregnancy, skin can lose its elasticity, so many women often wish to regain their old perkier breast shape once their children have stopped breast feeding. Plus, as we age, breast tissue atrophies, so the ageing process causes the shape of the breasts to change, making breasts gradually saggier as the skin becomes looser.

"Some women have breasts that do not fully develop, while others see significant changes in size after pregnancy, weight loss or simply ageing," explains cosmetic surgeon Angelica Kavouni. "There are 'tuberous' breasts that are small and conical and also Poland's Syndrome where the breast and chest do not develop fully."

There are many reasons why women choose breast augmentation. From women who have had a mastectomy and are looking at implants as part of breast reconstruction, to those who are simply dissatisfied with the size and shape of their breasts.

Another factor is having improvements made to breast size, either because they are too small or uneven in size, according to Dr Kavouni. "Women are under a lot of pressure to appear slim but with round, full breasts, which is a rather unusual natural occurrence! The C or D cup is often considered the golden standard for attractive breasts."

In 2006, there was an overall increase in cosmetic surgery procedures of 31.2% from 2005, with a large portion of this rise being women on the hunt for the perfect D-cup. Breast implants can certainly bring psychological benefits for women who may feel that their breasts are unwomanly and inadequate. Such surgery can also help restore lost self-esteem too.

"Breasts have always been a symbol of femininity, fertility and maternity, and women feel very self-conscious about the shape and appearance of their breasts,"

says Dr Kavouni. But research shows these are by no means 20-somethings with glamour model ambitions: the average age for breast augmentations is thought to be around 32-years-old.

Surveys have shown that the overwhelming majority of women who undergo breast augmentation say they would make the same decision again and that they are pleased with the improvement in their appearance as a result of breast enhancement.

At a glance

THE IMPLANT

There are currently two types of implant filler available in the UK: silicone gel implants and saline implants. Implants come in many different shapes and sizes, but the most common are round or teardrop shaped. The surface of the implant may be smooth or textured.

TIME SPENT ON PROCEDURE

The surgery generally takes about 90 minutes to complete.

RECOVERY TIME

You should be able to return home within 12 hours after surgery. You will feel sore, tired and you may experience a burning sensation in your nipples for a few days after the operation – rest assured that this will ease as the bruising starts to go down. Most patients return to work after a few days' recuperation but the swelling can take 3-5 weeks to go completely. Some patients experience a loss of sensitivity in their breasts after the operation, but this is only temporary.

HOW LONG TO HEAL?

During surgery, a short incision can be made either in the crease under the breast, around the areola (the dark skin around the nipple) or in the armpit. Saline filled implants are generally inserted empty and then filled with the salt water solution – this helps to reduce the size of the cut required and consequently leaves a smaller scar. Scars will be pink for several weeks, but they will begin to fade after a few months.

PRICE

Prices for a private breast augmentation procedure can range from £3,000-£5,000.

The British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons; www.bapras.org.uk and The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons; www.baaps.org.uk both have a handy search facility to find an accredited Consultant Plastic Surgeon in your area

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Dannii's D-cup

POP beauty Dannii Minogue has defended her decision to have breast implants. The sexy 33-year-old singer says she needed the surgery – which took her from a 34B to a D cup – after her boobs shrunk, along with her waistline.

"I used to be a lot bigger when I was a teenager. But then I lost a lot of weight and I lost my boobs, so I got them back"

