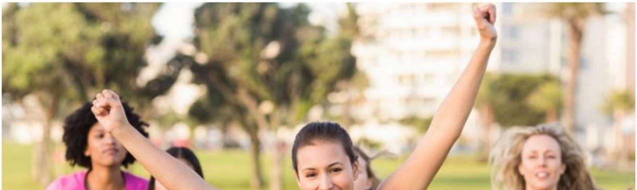
18. Understanding Your Genes Can Make a Major Difference in Your Potential Prognosis

family

Dr. Kolker says that more women are being screened for the BRCA gene than ever, and that's in large part to Angelina Jolie's disclosure about her mastectomy in 2013.

20. You Already Know More About Breast Cancer Than You Think



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breast cancer awareness

“Breast cancer awareness has been increasing substantially, which I think is really terrific,” says Dr. Kolker. “Women are much more educated and knowledgeable about their options today, which is so important.”

43. A Mastectomy Isn’t the Only Option

cancer patient with doctor

“The most important thing is taking care of the cancer,” says Dr. Adam Kolker, a New York City plastic surgeon, associate clinical professor of surgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, and a member of the Dubin Breast Center team.

However, once the cancer has been removed, there are often more reconstructive options than patients realize. “There are certain times when people get a diagnosis that says they are a potential candidate for treatment in a variety of ways,” says Dr. Kolker. “Some people may be candidates for breast conservation therapy, some may be candidates for mastectomy.”

44. A Lumpectomy and Mastectomy Are Totally Different Animals

Mastectomy

“If someone has a choice between a lumpectomy and a mastectomy, it’s not uncommon that they’ll consult with a reconstructive plastic surgeon,” says Dr. Kolker, noting that most people don’t meet with a plastic surgeon until later in the process. “Having multiple surgeries, like those involved in a full mastectomy, is a much different consideration than having a lumpectomy,” says Dr. Kolker. The recovery period for a full mastectomy and reconstruction former is generally significantly more involved than that required for a lumpectomy.

46. Yes, Implants Can Look Natural

woman smiling

“There has been a significant advance in the types of implants we use. It has to do with the shaping of the implants — they’re teardrop shaped and more natural,” says Dr. Kolker, who also points to the improvement of techniques like fat grafting in creating a more natural look post-surgery.

47. Plastic Surgeons Are Concerned With More Than Just Aesthetics

happy woman smiling

“The role of the plastic surgeon in this process is to restore that sense of self, that sense of balance. It’s much more than an issue of simply replacing that tissue that’s been removed,” says Dr. Kolker.

48. You May Find Yourself More Pleased With Your Appearance After Surgery

woman happy

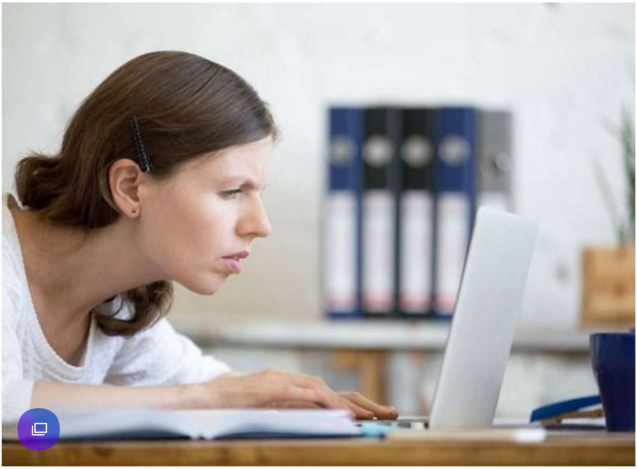
“Plastic surgery has a tremendous impact on preserving a person’s self-esteem,” says Dr. Kolker. “For people with some form of breast asymmetry or droop [prior to their diagnosis], they may feel better than before the surgery.”

49. You May Be Able to Use Your Own Tissue For Reconstruction

doctor discussing treatment patient

“Microsurgical techniques are absolutely spectacular in terms of autologous surgery,” meaning reconstructive surgery that uses a patient’s own tissue. However, your likelihood of being able to use your own tissue instead of an implant has to do with your existing body type. “Some may have no extra tissue to work with, some have more extra tissue,” says Dr. Kolker.

50. Reconstruction May Be a Multi-Step Process



woman reading on laptop

For most women who have reconstructive surgery, implants aren’t the first and final step. “We put in a tissue expander first, then an implant. It’s part of a 2-stage implant reconstruction, which is more common. Direct-to-implant reconstruction can be considered, although that’s less commonly done,” says Dr. Kolker.

If you’re looking for more expert advice, don’t miss these 40 Foods Doctors Always Eat.