

What It's Really Like To Get Breast Implants During A Pandemic

It was weird, but definitely not as weird as I was expecting.

PATIENT PERSPECTIVE

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YOANN BOYER/UNSPLASH

To be honest, I never really thought much about my breasts — until I started to lose them. They were always on the smaller side of average, yet, due to my height (I'm 5'9"), I believed they looked even smaller and flatter than they actually were. I felt like my shoulders and the flatness of my torso made my upper half just look... long. But, once I started to run marathons, the volume loss and deflation became a serious insecurity for me.

The Decision-Making Process

As much as I told myself that there was something impossibly chic about having tiny breasts (I mean, it's good enough for Kate Moss!), I couldn't stop myself from obsessing over my chest after every single run. I even bought a seamstress-style tape measure. And then a second one. I was certain the first was wrong — there's just *no way* that my A-cup bra could be baggy. It must be the tape.

It was a rude lesson to learn that losing weight is the same as gaining it. We can't choose the body area where it comes and goes, and that deflation from volume loss is *real* (I still don't know why I thought they would stay perky if they were flat as a pancake). But it wasn't until one Saturday, about six miles into a long run, that I realized I wasn't wearing a sports bra (or any bra for that matter) and I hadn't even noticed. At that moment, I began to seriously consider medical intervention in the form of [breast augmentation with implants](#).

Then the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) happened. I certainly couldn't stop running now — it was my only activity! But, as it did for many, the pandemic certainly put things in perspective. I always expected to get a '[mommy makeover](#)' after I had children, with a breast procedure or two on the list. But, over the last year, my perspective evolved into: What the heck am I waiting for?

The Consultation

"How much volume did you lose?" my plastic surgeon, [Adam Kolker, MD](#), immediately asked when I began our [breast augmentation](#) consultation by blaming marathons for my newfound insecurity. "*How did he know?*" I thought, as we sat socially distanced with me in a chair on one side of the office, Dr. Kolker on the opposite side, and his right-hand RN, Ashley, standing against the wall between us. All of us were masked, temperature-checked upon arrival, and sanitizing our hands like crazy. Although we were all vaccinated, both rising cases and the chaotic Delta variant were increasingly worrisome.

During the examination portion of our consult, Dr. Kolker and Ashley measured my breasts in a few different ways (think: the collarbone to nipple, nipple to base, and width, among others). We discussed my goals — "natural but juicy," I told him — but my main concern was balancing out my tall silhouette with implants that look like they belonged on my body's shape. Then they took the 'before' photos and opened a briefcase of implants to try on and take for a test drive. Dr. Kolker recommended I ignore the [measurements on the implants](#) and decide what I liked based on the look and feel, not the number of CCs.

Left alone, I tried on every single one, starting with the largest. I placed each set of implants in my bra and modeled from every angle. I felt like Goldilocks, and giving the different sizes a test run was immensely helpful for me to determine just how large I wanted to go. When Dr. Kolker returned to wrap up our conversation about size goals, I told him that I thought 250-ish CCs looked the most proportional to my body. He noted my preference and explained that the final decision on CC amount is decided in the OR, based on several factors that are revealed only once the incision is made. We also went over his instructions for pre-surgery care. As I was heading out, Ashley asked me to send a photo of my COVID-19 vaccination card before the big day.

The Surgery

On the day of the surgery, I arrived alone — no companions allowed — and went over what to expect before and after the surgery with Kat, the recovery room nurse. Dr. Kolker then came in to review our surgery goals once again, take a few more photos, and finally — the dramatic moment I was waiting for — [draw on my body with a Sharpie](#) just like they do in movies. At that moment, it all felt very real. I thought to myself, "*I have Sharpie on my body, it's REALLY happening!*"

In the last, and less dramatic, step before walking to the OR, I had a tête-à-tête with the [anesthesiologist](#) to align on our sedation plan. I asked him what the likelihood of accidentally waking up mid-surgery (a new-found fear), and he said he was zero for 60,000-plus, meaning that he's managed more than 60,000 surgeries and zero patients have woken up before they were meant to. I felt very safe and that weird new fear became a memory as we walked to the [operating room](#) to meet Ashley and Dr. Kolker.

I was very impressed with the OR — all of my information was splashed up on a wall-mounted TV across from Dr. Kolker, music was playing, the temperature was chilly (my favorite), and Ashley put a pillow under my knees for extra circulation. It felt kind of like a spa, until the anesthesiologist attached the needle.

Next thing I know, I woke up in the recovery room with Kat, who told me that my friend was on her way to the office to pick me up. Three juice boxes later, I was cleared to go home and hopped in an Uber.

It was all very efficient and speedy: neither Dr. Kolker nor his nurses overstayed or lingered. They came in, got down to business, answered my questions with care and compassion, and left because, after all, we were still indoors, in small treatment rooms, during a pandemic.

Post-Op

Happily, the [breast implant recovery process](#) wasn't as intense as I predicted. Pain was manageable, and I only took prescription pain killers for the first two days and then just Tylenol after that. The first few days post-op were mostly just uncomfortable. My chest felt pressure but rarely pain unless I forgot I just had surgery and tried to open our heavy fridge door. [Sleeping](#), however, was nearly impossible for the first week. Imagine trying to sleep sitting up straight — and I mean stiff-as-a-board-straight — with a [pillow fort](#) all around so you are immobile.

Dr. Kolker called me the day after surgery to check in, and I went back into the office on day seven for my first post-op appointment. On my post-care sheet, Dr. Kolker recommended a few [specific options for sports bras](#) to wear at one-week post-op, and I brought them along. I was temperature checked, masked, and ushered into a treatment room, where Dr. Kolker inspected [swelling](#), the incisions, and the implants, followed by taking a set of photos. I was instructed to wear a heavy-duty sports bra 24/7, along with a white strap that sat right above the implant to help with settling.

Two days later, I had a mini freakout that my sports bra was compressing my implant too much and called the office. Rather than have me come by (which I suspect they would have had me done in 'Normal Times'), Dr. Kolker hopped on FaceTime to visually inspect my compression concerns and reassure me.

On day 14, I began a set of three implant displacement 'massages,' which are very much not massages but rather awkward-feeling push and pull movements to encourage the implant to move, reducing the risk of capsular contracture. I was cleared by Dr. Kolker to take long walks and even a quick dip in the pool, but I still had to wear the sports bra and strap for most of the day.

At my week four in-office post-op appointment, Dr. Kolker evaluated my healing progress and took another round of 'after' photos. I couldn't stop gushing about how happy I was with the size and the totally manageable recovery. Somewhere around week three, I stopped feeling discomfort when lying down and sleeping became fun again. At the one-month mark, I was allowed to start wearing regular bras during the day, and I raced home to online shop — adding only the sexiest and laciest push-up bras to my cart.

My Takeaway

This past year, I've lost any sense of being able to evaluate what is weird. I may be in the minority, but I don't think that my experience of getting breast implants during a pandemic deviated *that* much from what the surgery would have looked like in pre-COVID times. Aside from the masking, sanitizing, and temperature checking, it seemed business as usual. All of my post-op visits, just like my [consult](#), were very efficiently managed but never rushed, just the good sense to discourage anyone to linger in tight spaces unnecessarily.

I couldn't be more thrilled with my results. My body finally looks proportional and natural, which I always kind of thought was just a thing you say to be nice — but they *actually* look natural! Hands down, I'm happy that I didn't wait. Pandemic or not, I'd do the surgery again. ■