



Working it out with

Breast Implants

Working out after a breast implant operation can certainly feel different and if you're not careful enough, you can dislodge the implants or even cause pain. We tell you what you need to know about working out safely and effectively with breast implants.

BY MAYA ANDERSON

In the fitness world, there are women who are so dedicated to their training and diet that their small percentage of body fat results in breast tissue also becoming minimal. Some, particularly industry professionals, choose to get implants for this reason, says Sydney-based plastic surgeon and member of the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons Dr Kouros Tavakoli. "In fact, 20 percent of women in my breast implant practice are personal trainers," he says.

It's not unusual for serious competitors in Fitness and Figure competitions to also decide on a breast augmentation operation, says U.S.-based plastic surgeon Dr Rick Silverman. "A large percentage of my cosmetic patient population is made up of men and women who engage in fitness and bodybuilding activities," he says. "Many of these patients have low body fat, including many women who are interested in breast augmentation."

But for these newly enhanced women, many don't realise how difficult – and different – picking up their old training routine can be when they get back into the gym after their operation. Fitness fanatic Jodhi Williams is one woman who realised that training would be harder for a while after she got her breast implants. One week after her operation, Jodhi had resumed normal activities like driving, doing the grocery shopping, working and was slowly getting back into her gym routine. "I jogged on the treadmill – no pain, but I could feel them," she says. "Training was the same. Bicep curls, triceps, legs, butt, even a spin class – all these were fine."

When it came to chest work, Jodhi had to be extra careful not to put excessive strain on her muscles during this time. "I didn't do any push ups or chin ups – this strained my chest muscles, jerked them and it scared me because I had no knowledge of what can or can't be done, or how soon," she says.

Sufficient time for rest and recovery and gradually easing yourself back into your gym routine is crucial after your breast augmentation. If you're not careful, exercising your chest too soon or moving

too quickly into heavy chest workouts after surgery can actually cause displacement of the implants. However, Dr Silverman is adamant that if your body has recovered enough before you hit the gym again and you have the guidance of a knowledgeable surgeon, any problems with resuming weight workouts should be minimal. "I allow my patients to resume all chest training after six weeks wearing good

surgeons don't spend as much time in the gym, or engaging in other interest-specific activities, as their patients, resulting in a lack of knowledge about the activity," he says.

Jodhi's surgeon was aware that she worked out in a gym and said she could get back to jogging, but should wait a few weeks before resuming push ups. But for a gym bunny like Jodhi, the hardest part

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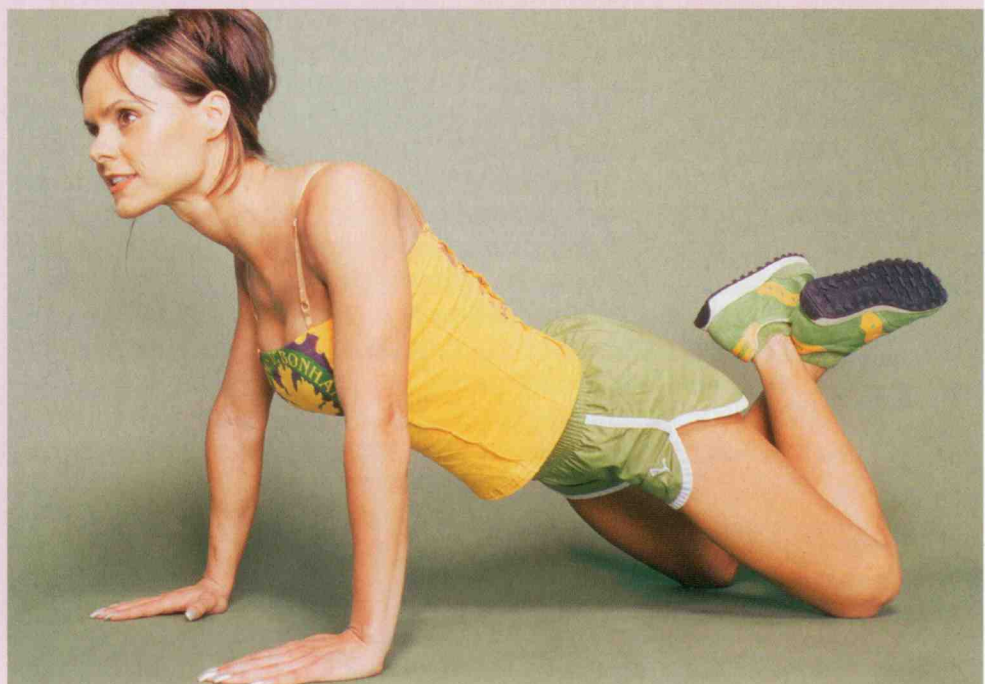
support – even two sports bras – when they train," he explains. "I have not had any of my patients experience any sort of displacement of the implants in this circumstance. I should emphasise, however, that I am very careful about how I create the implant pocket, with very little lateral dissection. In other words, I minimise how wide I make the pocket on the sides, so that the implant doesn't fall to the side."

While rupture of implants through exercise is extremely rare because they are designed to be very strong, it is always best to be careful. "Breast implants can rupture, but this phenomenon is rare in gel implants," Dr Tavakoli says.

Dr Silverman says that a surgeon should ideally advise his or her patient about exercise activities following any procedure. "Unfortunately, many

about training post-implant was learning to take it easy for a while. "I felt virtually no pain during my whole recovery, so I knew even though I could still, to my amazement, do so much, I had to be careful due to stitches and also muscle repair," she says. She didn't attempt to do a full set of push-ups for about six weeks. "I did none for two weeks, tried week three but it felt like the muscles were pulling tight," she says. "This also happened when I grabbed the bar to do pull ups. It was too early. I felt a real tight jerk and it gave me a fright."

Make sure you discuss your planned exercise regimen in detail with your surgeon so they can advise you on what to do and what not to do, and learn how to achieve the best results. "I am fairly specific when instructing patients, realising that most will push the limits if they're



committed to working out and the gym," Dr Silverman says. "I know that's how I am, and therefore, it's preferable to outline specific activities, rather than let the patient guess what might or might not be safe."

Many surgeons can be helpful advisors when it comes to getting back on the fitness track. "On occasion, however, a lack of information leads a surgeon to simply advise that a patient shouldn't do a specific activity after surgery," Dr Silverman says. "Remarkably, over the years, I've received emails from women who had undergone breast augmentation and were told by their surgeon that they could never lift weights again. Perhaps they misunderstood their surgeon - but then again, perhaps not!"

One thing that could affect the way you train is the placement of your implants, which is of particular importance in breast augmentation patients who have very active lifestyles. Basically, you can opt to have the implants placed over the pectoralis major muscle, or under the muscle in the 'sub muscular' position. In a sub muscular position, the

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implant is not entirely under the muscle, but half under the muscle and half not under the muscle. "We are trying to stop the patient seeing or feeling the implants and in very thin patients this can be a problem," says Dr Briggs. Don't forget that in general, the bigger the implant, the harder it can be to start working out again. Your implant placement and size may affect the limitations of your training in your post-op weeks, so discuss this with your surgeon.

Dr Silverman allows his patients to begin cardio after one week. "They can resume weight training after two weeks, focusing on body parts that impact the chest less - legs, for example," he says.

"When they start upper body training, I encourage very light resistance, which can be increased gradually as long as there is no pain with the motion." He adds, "Following this regimen, my patients who bench press have reported achieving their pre-operative weights within eight to 12 weeks post-op. None have developed complications from this approach." Remember, if you feel pain, don't do that particular exercise for a while.

"I dropped my right arm out to the side due to fatigue doing an incline chest flye and press combo and felt a twang in my right chest muscle," Jodhi says. "I did no harm this time, but it reminded me that yes they are in there and I do need to be

Did you know?

- Breast enlargement is one of the most popular surgery procedures with an estimated 8,000 implants performed in Australia in 1998.
- The 1999 report of the NSW Committee of Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery states that 50,000 cosmetic surgical procedures such as liposuction and breast augmentation were performed that year.
- Although exact figures don't exist for Australia, US trends mirror those in Australian cosmetic surgery. In 2004, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 9.2 million cosmetic surgery procedures were performed in the US, a 24 percent jump from the year 2000.
- According to findings from Choice, two studies of silicone breast implants have indicated that 80 percent of patients experienced at least one complication.
- A study, of recipients of inflatable saline implants, found 64 percent of patients required further surgery. However, members of the Inquiry Committee referred to other literature that reported much lower complication rates.
- It was reported that only four to 15 percent of women experience the most common complication, capsular contracture, with symptoms characterised as a poor clinical result - hard, painful distorted breasts requiring corrective surgery.
- Patients are generally reported to give high satisfaction ratings for the procedure.
- In a recent survey, over 80 percent of patients undergoing breast augmentation stated that a "C" cup was their desired postoperative goal.



