

BBR (Bilateral Breast Reduction)

Bilateral breast reduction (reduction mammoplasty) is a surgical procedure for women experiencing physical and psychological symptoms due to large, heavy breasts. This guide helps you to identify appropriate candidates, initiate workup, and refer for surgical management.

Common Presentations in General Practice

- Chronic upper back, neck and shoulder pain
- Postural issues, bra strap grooving
- Intertrigo or rashes under the breast fold
- Recurrent skin infections
- Restricted physical activity, exercise intolerance
- Psychological distress: body image concerns, social anxiety

Red Flags & When to Refer

Refer to a plastic surgeon when the following are present:

- Failed conservative measures (e.g., physiotherapy, posture correction)
- Persistent skin infections or intertrigo despite treatment
- Breast size causing chronic pain and functional limitations
- Teenagers with macromastia and significant psychosocial impact
- Possible underlying breast pathology (e.g., palpable masses, unilateral changes)
- Pre-referral Workup

Recommended Imaging:

- Bilateral mammogram and/or breast ultrasound (age-appropriate)
- Especially for patients >40 or with family history of breast cancer

Additional Notes:

- Document BMI; ideal candidates typically have BMI <35
- Address smoking status and comorbidities

Management Options

Non-Surgical (First-Line):

- Weight management
- Physiotherapy
- Well-fitted support bras (orthotic referral if needed)

Surgical:

- Performed by a specialist surgeon
- Day or overnight stay, under general anaesthetic
- Involves removal of glandular/fatty tissue and breast reshaping

Post-Operative Expectations

- **Recovery:** 4–6 weeks
- **Time off work:** 1–2 weeks (depending on occupation)
- **Wound care:** Clinic follow-up for dressings and suture checks
- **Monitoring:** Watch for infection, wound breakdown, sensory changes
- Long-term outcomes include pain relief, improved posture, better psychosocial wellbeing

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Referral Pathway

- Direct referral to a FRACS-qualified Surgeon
- Include patient history, imaging results, BMI, and treatment trial summary

Item Number

Yes, there is a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item number for bilateral breast reduction surgery.

✔ MBS Item Number 45523 – Bilateral Breast Reduction

Item 45523 covers bilateral reduction mammoplasty (breast reduction surgery on both breasts) with surgical repositioning of the nipple.

- The patient has **macromastia** (excessively large breasts) causing **chronic pain** in the neck or shoulder region.
- The procedure **does not involve the insertion of any prosthesis.**

Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for this Medicare rebate, you must meet specific medical criteria, including:

- Experiencing **persistent physical symptoms** such as back, neck, or shoulder pain due to large breasts.
- Having a **medical referral** from your General Practitioner (GP) that confirms the procedure is medically necessary.
- Undergoing surgery performed by a **Medicare-eligible specialist.**

It's important to note that cosmetic breast reductions, or those performed solely for aesthetic reasons, are not covered under this item number.

Additional Medicare Item Numbers

For other breast reduction scenarios, the following item numbers may apply:

Item 45520: Unilateral breast reduction (one breast) with surgical repositioning of the nipple, typically in the context of breast cancer or developmental abnormalities.

Item 45522: Unilateral breast reduction without surgical repositioning of the nipple.

For detailed information on these item numbers, you can visit the official MBS Online website.



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A/Prof Bish Soliman is a Sydney based Plastic Surgeon with an interest in complex microsurgical reconstruction including breast reconstruction, aesthetic surgery of the face, breast and body as well as skin cancer surgery.

Interests include:

- Complex Microsurgery (breast, head and neck, lower limb)
- Breast surgery (reconstruction, revision)
- Aesthetic surgery (face, breast, body)
- Skin cancer surgery

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