

USING INNER THIGHS FOR BREAST RECONSTRUCTION

What is it? The TUG (transverse upper gracilis) flap uses tissue from the inner portion of the upper thigh, just under the groin crease to reconstruct a natural-shaped breast. Patients get an 'inner thigh lift' and the skin and fat with the gracilis muscle is detached from its blood supply in the thigh and re-attached to blood vessels in the chest. The operation was only described 6-7 years ago in world medical literature and so is a relatively new technique. It takes 4 hours to perform and has a success rate comparable to a DIEP flap.



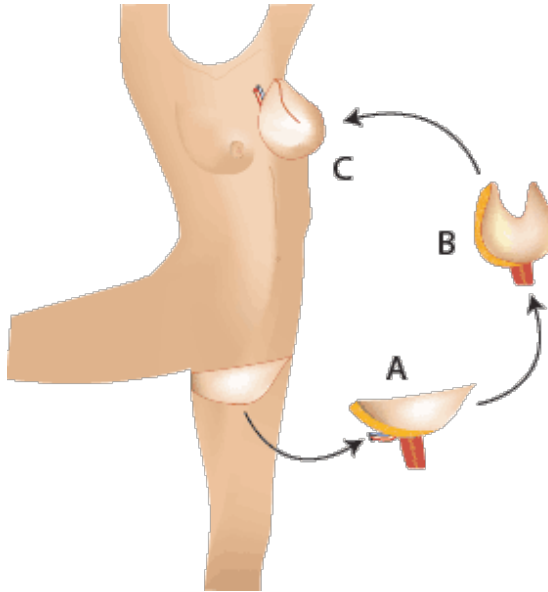
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How long does recovery take? Similar to a DIEP flap, the hospital stay is 4-6 days and recovery is 8 weeks. To aid healing and prevent tension on the scars at the inner thigh in the first 2-3 weeks, one is advised to avoid keeping legs too far apart.

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When is it preferred over other flap reconstructions? A DIEP flap is usually the first choice reconstruction for patients who have a 'tummy roll'. However, those women who have small to moderate sized breasts, and have had previous tummy-tuck surgery or multiple abdominal operations or simply wish to avoid scars on the tummy, a TUG reconstruction is an ideal choice. It is the preferred option over using buttock tissue (GAP flap) as buttock fat can be firm and difficult to mould into a breast shape. Both tummy and inner thigh fat is soft, very similar to breast fat and therefore, can be used to create breasts that look and feel natural and warm.

Are there any downsides? Like any major operation, it has complications. In 2% of patients, the reconstruction may fail. Occasionally, fluid can form at the inner thigh requiring drainage in clinic. To decrease its formation, it is advisable to wear lycra shorts for 3-4 weeks after surgery. Though the resultant scar is well hidden just below the groin crease, it may be visible in swimsuits and underwear and may stretch. Loss of gracilis muscle does not result in any noticeable functional impairment.

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