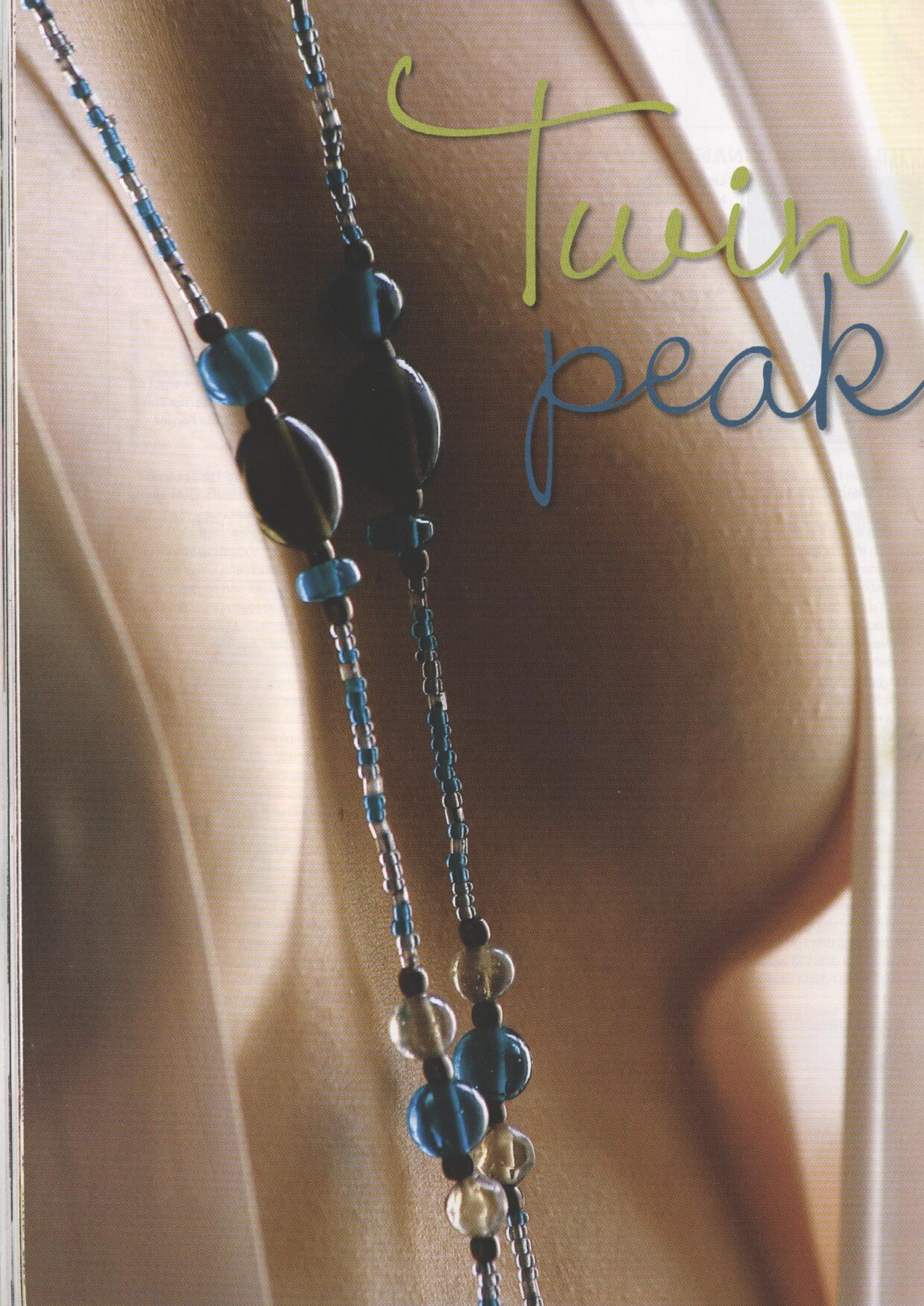


Twin  
peak



## If one of your cups is only half as full as the other then you are not alone. Breast asymmetry is a surprisingly common problem, as Vicky Eldridge discovers...

When Aristotle said, 'Beauty depends on size as well as symmetry', he wasn't talking about women's breasts, but the adage rings true all the same. It's a generally accepted rule that where beauty or attraction is concerned, symmetry matters. It's no wonder, then, that having symmetrical breasts is a concern for many women.

'Nature admires symmetry and balance,' says consultant plastic and reconstructive surgeon David Ross. 'There are very few asymmetrical things in nature that are considered attractive, and for women their breasts may be at the heart of how they view themselves.'

There are two main types of asymmetry (where one breast is bigger or a different shape to the other) – congenital, where you are born with it, and 'acquired', which can happen at any time of your life and can be the result of a medical procedure, childbirth or breastfeeding.

Experts estimate that more than two-thirds of women have some degree of breast asymmetry. For most, this difference is so minor that they don't even know about it or, if they do, it is not noticeable to anyone else. For around 10% of women, however, breast asymmetry can be a major concern, leaving them self-conscious and embarrassed about their breasts.

'Breast asymmetry is extremely common,' says Patrick Mallucci, a consultant plastic surgeon at London Plastic Surgery Associates. 'I would say that around 70% of women who have got minor asymmetry (less than a cup-size difference) don't even know they have it.'

Rajiv Grover, a consultant plastic surgeon on Harley Street, agrees. 'It is very common, when women come in for breast enhancement, reduction or uplift procedures, to notice a difference of 1cm or more between their breasts,' he says. 'Major asymmetry is much more rare. Asymmetry of a cup size is probably going to affect something like 7-9% of the population, with asymmetry of two cup sizes or more affecting a lot less, perhaps 3-4%.'

So why are so many women reluctant to talk about their asymmetry or seek treatment for it?

'Significant asymmetry of a cup size or more can have an enormous social impact,' says Dr Mallucci. 'I think there is a lot of peer pressure to look a certain way, wear certain things or look

good in a bikini, and it is mortifying to women if they can't do that. Many find it very difficult to talk about and you will often find that their friends and family have no idea. One of the classic things I find is that almost everyone who has asymmetry thinks they are the only one. They may struggle for a long time before they pluck up the courage to see a plastic surgeon.'

Research carried out by Mentor Medical Systems, a manufacturer of breast implants, last year showed that lopsided and misshapen breasts were one of the most common reasons for women to feel self-conscious, with a quarter of those surveyed saying they felt depressed when they thought about their breasts. One in five said they always undressed in the dark or away from their partner and almost 40% said they wouldn't wear a bikini in public.

'Breast asymmetry can have a profound effect on many women's quality of life,' says Mr Ross. 'Many younger women who have asymmetrical breasts are told when they're in their teens that it is something that evens itself out – but it doesn't. For these women it is important to correct this, which is why they opt for surgery.'

### CANCER LINKS

While breast asymmetry can undoubtedly cause low self-esteem, there is a more serious physical side to the problem. Recent research

published in *The Journal of Cancer Research* found that the relative odds of getting cancer went up 50% for each 100ml increase in breast asymmetry, so you should make sure you have your breasts checked out before undergoing any treatment, particularly if you have developed the problem when you are older.

'If you have significant breast asymmetry, it is first and foremost important to consider whether this is something you have always had or whether it has developed in later life,' warns plastic surgeon Chris Inglefield. 'Development of asymmetry later on in life can indicate some kind of pathology, so it is important to check it out.'

### KNIFE OR NEEDLE?

If you have noticeable asymmetry and you want to do something about it, there are a number of both surgical and non-surgical options available. If the difference in your breast size is less than a cup size then surgery is not usually advised, but non-surgical treatments like Macrolane – an injectable breast-shaping procedure – may help.

If you are going to opt for surgery then the first thing you need to do is decide which breast you would like to change so you can discuss the various procedures available with a surgeon and find the right one for you.

Breast asymmetry can be corrected with either breast implants (to augment one or both breasts) or breast reduction (to reduce the larger of the two breasts) and, in some cases, liposuction to reduce the volume of the larger breast. If there is sagging in one or both of your breasts, this can be corrected with a breast lift. Nipple elevation can also be performed if your nipples are in a different position on each breast.

It is important to remember that whichever option you choose, you may require work on both breasts to achieve the best result and, in some cases, more than one operation.

'Most of the time to achieve symmetry without doing something to both breasts is difficult,' says Mr Grover. 'Where the degree of asymmetry is significant, you may need two operations to get it right.'

#### BREAST ASYMMETRY FACTS

- Women with breast asymmetry have a higher chance of developing breast cancer, according to recently published research
- More than 60% of women have some degree of breast asymmetry with an estimated 20-30% having more than a cup-size difference
- The popularity of breast surgery has increased by 275% in the last five years
- One in 10 women claimed to have a whole cup-size difference between their breasts in a survey carried out by Mentor Medical

**'CLOTHES SHOPPING IS NOW MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE AND I GET GREAT PLEASURE FROM BUYING LINGERIE!'**



BEFORE



AFTER

**Name:** Ange Smyth  
**Age:** 30  
**Profession:** Welfare officer  
**From:** Woking, Surrey

**Reasons for breast augmentation:** 'I was very aware of uneven breast size. The right side was an AA and the left side was not even enough to fill a cup size.'

**Procedure:** Different implant sizes were used to correct asymmetric shape. Both breasts are now a C/D cup.

**Surgeon:** Mr Hicham Mouallem, Court House Clinics (0845 555 5050)

**What she says:** 'With hindsight I feel that I wasted three years contemplating augmentation. I undertook huge amounts of research on the internet. But once I decided to go for it, from my initial consultation with the clinic manager right up to my surgical procedure, I felt emotionally supported and was provided with all the necessary information to reduce any anxieties. It felt like I was accompanied for the entirety of my journey, including one-on-one consultations. Other cosmetic surgery companies I approached just sent lots of information leaflets, so it was refreshing to be treated as an individual. I am very happy with the results as my breasts are now the same size and shape. Clothes shopping is much more enjoyable and I get great pleasure from buying lingerie especially! I recently went on holiday and was delighted to finally show off my new assets!'

If you decide to go for augmentation then you may benefit from a new implant that has been developed specifically to address the problem of moderate breast asymmetry. The Spectra has a silicone outer-casing with an adjustable inner chamber, which is filled with saline solution. This allows the surgeon to top up the volume of saline in the implant to make the breasts symmetrical.

'From the surgeon's perspective, the main advantage of the Spectra is that, while the patient is on the operating table, it allows you to make very fine adjustments to balance breast size, with all the benefits and product quality of gel implants,' says Mr Ross. 'There is a greater degree of finesse without compromising the aesthetic requirement and comfort of the patient.'

Whether you are having a lift, reduction or implants to correct your asymmetry, the procedure will need to be done under general anaesthetic and usually takes 1-4 hours depending on the extent of surgery required. You will also need to allow time to recover.

'You will need at least one week at home doing nothing after any of these procedures,' says Mr Grover. 'You will then need another week at home where you can walk around but should refrain from any strenuous activity. After

two weeks the stitches are taken out and you can go back to work. You will need to wear a bra day and night for four weeks, and no sports or foreign holidays for four weeks.'

As with any cosmetic surgical procedure, there are also some risks involved in surgery to correct breast asymmetry. As well as the potential dangers inherent in undergoing general anaesthetic, risks include infection, temporary loss of nipple sensation (with implants this should return to normal in 3-4 weeks; with a reduction or uplift there may be a gradual improvement in sensation but it may never be quite the same) and, if you have had implants, capsule formation. However, these complications are rare.



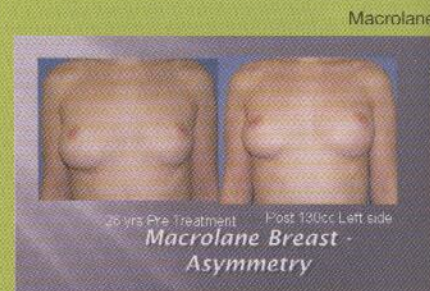
**Spectra, a new adjustable implant designed to address breast asymmetry**

**NON-SURGICAL OPTIONS**

If your asymmetry is no more than two cup sizes and you don't fancy going under the knife then Macrolane a hyaluronic-acid body-shaping injection, could be used to add volume and shape one or both of your breasts. The advantages of Macrolane are that you do not have to go under a general anaesthetic or stay overnight in hospital. There is also much less downtime with the procedure – a few days as opposed to up to six weeks – and there is little or no scarring.

The only downside is that the results are not permanent, lasting for 12-18 months so you would need to have top-up treatments once a year. Because it is temporary, Macrolane can be a good way to 'test the water' if you are not sure about surgery. It can give you a good idea of what your breasts would look like if you did opt to go under the knife at a later date.

'Macrolane really has opened up the options for a lot of women to be able to achieve a much more accurate degree of symmetry,' says plastic surgeon Chris Inglefield. 'Because it is such a bespoke treatment, you really can tailor it to the individual to not only add volume but to create shape. With asymmetry, quite commonly I would get the patient to come in for two or three appointments to evolve the shape of the breast over time.'



26 yrs Pre Treatment Post 130cc Left side  
**Macrolane Breast - Asymmetry**

This 26-year-old woman had mild asymmetry with the left breast being slightly smaller and higher up than the right. Macrolane was used to even out her breasts.