



POST-OP INSTRUCTIONS BREAST RECONSTRUCTION WITH TISSUE FLAPS (DIEP)

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SPECIFIC POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

- After surgery, you will be closely monitored in the hospital for 3 days. After discharge, it is important to have someone available to stay with you for the first 24-48 hours. You will be weak and drowsy and may require help the first few times you get out of bed.
- Go to bed with your head and shoulders elevated on at least 2 firm pillows (about 30 degrees). **For the 2-3 weeks after surgery**, we recommend you sleep in the “Beach Chair position” on your back in a recliner, or in a bed with your head propped up and 1-2 pillows under your knees for the first 2 weeks after surgery. Again, do not sleep on your side until all drains are removed. It is important to stay flexed at the waist to keep tension off the incision line and abdominal repair. Do NOT cross your legs, as this increases the risk for blood clots.
- You are to wear an abdominal binder 24/7 for the first 2 weeks following surgery! This is to help prevent the buildup of fluid in your abdomen. When your drains are removed, you need to wear your abdominal binder for at least one more week to ensure no fluid builds since you no longer have any drains to remove that fluid. You should sleep in this binder as well. You can take 30-minute breaks from wearing the binder every 6-8 hours as needed. You can take your abdominal binder off when showering as well.
- It is important to get out of bed (with assistance) as early and often as possible after your surgery to prevent postoperative problems. While the goal is to move about, even getting out of a chair will be beneficial. Please take frequent deep breaths to keep your lungs clear (15-20 per hour). **YOU SHOULD BE WALKING**
- For the first week, keep your arm movements to a minimum. You may have been given arm exercises to complete by your breast surgeon which you are okay to do. Avoid using your arms to lift yourself out of bed and into bed for the first 48-72 hours.
- A light diet is best after surgery. Your nurse will begin by offering liquids and progressing to soups or Jello. You may start a regular diet the next day if you feel ready. Over the next 6 weeks, a high protein diet will benefit your recovery. Pre-made shakes (eg. Boost, Muscle Milk) or soluble powder (whey, soy, etc) from a nutrition store is recommended.
- While in the hospital, your pain will be controlled with scheduled IV and oral pain medication. After discharge from the hospital, take the pain medication at regular intervals for the first 2-3 days. It is not uncommon for you to need it every 3-4 hours. Do not take on an empty stomach. If the prescription pain medication is too strong for your pain, over the counter ibuprofen (400-800 mg every

6-8 hours) can be substituted. You may be given an anti-anxiety/muscle relaxant medication that you may take as well to prevent aggravation of the pain cycle.

- Frequently, small **drains** are used to draw off any accumulating fluid after surgery. The bulb should be kept compressed at all times. The fluid will need to be removed from the bulb 3 times daily. Please keep a record of the time and how much fluid is emptied from the bulb. Bring this record with you to the follow-up office appointment. Usually drains are removed within the first week or two after surgery. Please refer to our drain video on how to take care of your drains located on our website.
- You will have a prineo tape dressing over your incision. This will protect the incision for 10-14 days. You can shower with the strips on starting 48 hours (2 days) after surgery. Use a mild perfume/dye free soap and gently cleanse around the incision lines. Let the dressing fall off naturally. Do not peel this dressing off as it may delay wound healing and cause excessive scarring.
- **DO NOT SMOKE** or ingest any nicotine containing products (gum, e-cigarettes, etc.). This is very important for optimal wound healing.
- Bra: You will most likely be sent home from the hospital wearing a **LOOSE** surgical bra unless Dr. Constantine decides he does not want you to wear a bra (which he will tell you at the hospital before you go home whether he wants you to wear one or not). This bra should not be too tight as we do not want to compromise the blood flow to your flaps. It should be comfortable to wear and should not feel restrictive or too tight. We recommend wearing your surgical bra 24/7 for the first 6 weeks after surgery unless instructed otherwise. No underwire bras until after 6 weeks.
- You may gradually resume light daily activities 48 hours after hospital discharge being careful to avoid any activity that causes pain or discomfort. **Strenuous activities and exercises such as running lifting anything over 10-15 lbs, pilates, biking, etc are to be avoided until 6 weeks after surgery.** During the first 6 week recovery period, your heart rate should stay below 100 beats per minute. We encourage you to go on short 15-20 minutes walks frequently starting 48 hours after your surgery with assistance until you are off all narcotics and feel comfortable walking on your own. You may walk up and down stairs slowly as long as you feel comfortable and steady on your feet doing so.
- Prolonged soaking of the incision sites in a bathtub, hot tub, swimming pool or other body of water should be avoided for 6 weeks to allow proper healing to occur.
- Driving may be resumed when a sharp turn of the steering wheel will not cause pain; this is usually within 14-21 days and when off all narcotics.
- All incisions will be extremely sensitive to sunlight during the healing phase. Direct sun contact or tanning booths are to be avoided. Use of clinical grade sunscreen with SPF 30 and zinc oxide (UVA and UVB protection) is recommended for at least 6 months.
- Beginning at about 3 weeks after surgery when you incision sites are fully healed without scabbing, apply a **silicone scar cream** to the incisions to maximize wound healing. Use the cream for 6 months after surgery. The addition of a hydrating cream and vitamin cream will promote early softening and maturation of these areas.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

- Sensations like numbness, sharpness, and burning are common during the healing process. These sensations may last several weeks and will gradually disappear.

- Bruising and swelling are normal for 2-3 weeks. It will disappear over time.
- You may initially feel like your breasts are too high, too flat, asymmetric or not the correct size. This will resolve over the first 4-6 weeks postoperatively as swelling resolves and tissue settles

IMPORTANT

- **If you have nausea, vomiting, rash, shortness of breath, or diarrhea after taking your medications, please call our office.**
- **If you develop a fever (oral temperature greater than 100 degrees), redness and/or increased pain at surgical incision sites, please call Dr. Constantine.**
- **If you have major dental work or major surgery, please notify Dr. Constantine so he can prescribe a pre-operative medication to protect your implants from possible infection.**

If you have any questions, please call Dr. Constantine's office at 214-739-5760.

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