



Frequently Asked Questions

AFTER SURGERY:

WHAT BRA SHOULD I WEAR AFTER SURGERY?

- We will not know what bra size you are until after your surgery. Therefore, there is no need to buy any bras until after your surgery. You will be going home with a bra from the surgery center. We recommend you buy a few extra bras in the same size as the bra you were sent home in after surgery. We advise wearing a wireless bra that is comfortable and that closes (zips, clasps) in the front for 6 weeks following your day of surgery. (See attached list of recommended bras),

DO I WEAR MY BRA 24/7 AND DO I NEED TO SLEEP IN IT?

- Yes. You should be wearing your bra the majority of the day/night for the first 6 weeks after surgery. If you are relaxing at home and need a small break from wearing the bra, you can remove it for 30 minutes to an hour at a time.
- You should also be wearing the “fluffs” you were sent home from the hospital wearing in the sides of your bra/under your armpits 24/7. If the “fluffs” we used to stuff your bra become dirty, you can throw them away and replace them either with new gauze or with clean, dry soft socks. You should be wearing these “fluffs” 24/7 while you have your drains in and for at least one week after your all of your drains have been removed. The purpose of these “fluffs” is to encourage your skin to stick down to your chest wall under your armpit. This will prevent fluid from building up around your breasts/under your armpits as well as encourage any fluid buildup to go into your drains. It is important to continue wearing your “fluffs” for 1-2 more weeks after your drains have been removed in order to prevent fluid up, especially since you no longer have drains in to remove that fluid.
- You should be sleeping in your bra 24/7 for the first 6 weeks after your surgery unless instructed otherwise.

CAN I USE ICE/HEATING PAD FOR PAIN RELIEF?

- Heat and Ice should NOT be used. After surgery, your chest will be numb, making you susceptible to burns, frostbite and skin damage if heat or ice is left on too long.

BANDAGES?

- You will have a clear tape over your incisions that will be removed in the office about 2 weeks following surgery. You may shower with this tape on as it protects the incision but DO NOT take a bath for the first 6 weeks after surgery.
- You will also most likely have drains covered with a clear bandage allowing you to shower without getting this area wet. Do not remove or try to change out your bandages at home. All bandages will be removed and changed when needed at the office during your appointments.

HOW LONG TO WEAR COMPRESSION STOCKINGS?

- Compression stockings aid in preventing blood clots after surgery. Although not required, we recommend wearing compression stockings until you resume normal physical activity.

WHEN CAN I START USING SCAR CREAMS/SILICONE SHEETING?

- Once the tape is removed from your incisions and all incisions are healed with little to no scabbing, we recommend using silicone sheeting (Cica Care silicone strips or Scar Away which can be purchased from Amazon or CVS Pharmacy) or silicone cream/gel (Silagen is sold in our office or Silicone gel on Amazon) for 3-4 months.

WHEN CAN I RESUME MY NORMAL MEDICATIONS?

- Most medications may be resumed the day after surgery. However, if you take blood thinners (i.e. Coumadin, Eliquis, Xarelto) please notify your medical provider for further instruction.
- If you are taking Tamoxifen, you may restart this medication 2 weeks after surgery.

STITCHES:

- In the majority of cases, all stitches used are absorbable. You will not have to have them removed.

IS IT NORMAL TO HAVE NUMBNESS AND/OR NERVE PAIN AROUND BREASTS AND/OR IN THE ARMPIT?

- Yes. There are a lot of different nerves in and around the breast area. It is normal to feel numbness in your breasts and across your chest. This is because the majority of the nerves that were providing sensation to your breasts were removed with your breast tissue during the mastectomy. Unfortunately, the numbness and lack of sensation to your breasts is a consequence of your mastectomy and will most likely be permanent. You may also feel various types of pain such as: sharp/shooting pains, chest tightness across the entire chest, or generalized soreness. This pain can often times radiate into your armpit region as well. These types of pain are normal and expected. How long this pain lasts varies from person to person and can last anywhere from just a few days to a couple of months. If you feel that your pain is unbearable and not being managed by the pain medication we prescribed you, please call our office to let us know.
- Just a reminder that your tissue expanders are sewn in place to prevent them from flipping. Because of this, you may feel pain around your sternum and your ribs where we placed sutures to hold your expanders in place. This pain can feel sharp or stabbing, but once again, it is normal and should improve with time.
- Lastly, it is important to remember that these tissue expanders have a stiff outer silicone shell. Because of this, it is normal for you to either see or feel the corners/edges of the tissue expander after surgery. Your tissue expanders will be filled partially with normal saline in your surgery. Due to no longer having any breast tissue and because your tissue expanders are typically not filled all the way during your surgery, it is normal to see a “ripple effect” across your breasts. If you have chosen to do an implant-based reconstruction, that rippling effect will be much less noticeable once your tissue expanders have been removed and replaced with silicone gel breast implants. If you have decided to undergo a DIEP reconstruction, you should no longer have any rippling once your tissue expanders are removed and replaced with your own tissue.

SLEEPING:

DO I NEED A SPECIAL PILLOW?

- No, it is not medically necessary to purchase a special pillow for after surgery. However; of you are a side sleeper, many people find using a “pregnancy pillow” to be helpful since you will be sleeping on your back for the first couple of weeks after surgery (see below for more details).

HOW DO I NEED TO SLEEP?

- For most breast surgeries, we recommend you sleep on your back for the first 3 weeks after surgery with your head/shoulders slightly elevated on two pillows (about 30 degrees). If you have drains, do not sleep on your side until all drains have been removed.
- For DIEP flap breast surgeries, 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.

BATHING/SHOWERING

WHEN CAN I SHOWER?

- Unless otherwise informed, you are able to shower the day following surgery. All incisions have a clear tape over them (unless you reported an allergy to this tape, in which case you would have brown steri strips instead). This clear tape protects your incisions and allows you to shower with it in place. If you have drains, you will most likely have a clear bandage over the drain sites that allow you to shower without getting this area wet.
- To prevent your drains from getting pulled out, tangled or tripped over while in the shower, you can attach the white loops at the end of each drain to a long lanyard/necklace and wear it around your neck so that your drains are dangling up high and not down low.
- We recommend you DO NOT take a bath, swim, or submerge yourself in water for the first 6 weeks after your surgery and only if all of your drains have been removed and your incision sites are healed. This is because large bodies of water can harbor harmful bacteria thus increasing the risk of your incision and/or drain sites becoming infected.

ACTIVITY:

WHEN CAN I SWIM?

- You must wait at least 6 weeks after your surgery to swim. See above for further explanation.

HOW SOON CAN I FLY ON AN AIRPLANE?

- You will be able to fly on an airplane within 7-10 days after your surgery. However, we do still recommend that you get assistance when lifting your baggage, as we do not want you to lift over 10-15 lbs. It may also be a good idea to wear compression stockings if flying within 6 weeks after your surgery to further prevent development of a blood clot.

WHEN CAN I HAVE SEX?

- Once your drains are out and all of your incisions have fully healed (this is usually around 4-6 weeks) you are clear to have sexual intercourse.

WHEN CAN I EXERCISE?

- If you have undergone a mastectomy, you may have received arm exercises or stretches from your breast surgeon, which you may do as instructed.
- For the first 48 hours, keep your arm movements to a minimum and use assistance to get in and out of bed. Try to avoid using your arms to lift yourself in or out of bed without assistance for the first 48 hours.

- About 48 hours after your surgery, you may start going on short walks around the block/around the house and resume normal daily activities and household chores. Be careful to avoid any activity that causes increased pain or discomfort. **NO LIFTING OVER 10-15 LBS** for the first 6 weeks after surgery.
- You may resume strenuous exercise 6 weeks after surgery or if instructed otherwise by Dr. Constantine. Heart rate should stay below 100 beats per minute for the first 6 weeks.
- If you had DIEP Flap Breast surgery, your stomach is going to be and feel very tight for the first 1-2 weeks after surgery. We do not want to stretch you abdomen too fast during that time as this can put heavy stress/tension on your incision sites potentially causing them to open and not close properly. Therefore, we recommend that you walk in the “old lady using a cane position” for the first two weeks after surgery with your knees bent, waist flexed forward at about a 45-degree angle, and your back straight. We also recommend using a walker or having someone assist you while getting up and walking around the house during the first few days after you are discharged from the hospital.

DRAINS:

DRAIN LOG?

- It is important to follow instructions regarding drain care. You will need to strip/milk each drain tube and measure the total output (in cc's or mL) per drain 2-3 times a day. It is important to write these measurements down in the drain log that was provided in your pre-op paperwork. **MAKE SURE TO BRING THE DRAIN LOG WITH YOU TO YOUR POST-OP APPOINTMENTS, without it, we will not be able to remove the drains.**

HOW LONG DO THE DRAINS STAY IN?

- Drains typically stay in for about 1- 2 weeks after surgery depending on your drain output amounts. It is important to remember to record the total output from each individual drain at the end of every day in your drain log. About one week after your surgery, we will have you call the office and report your total drain outputs over the last few days. If your drain outputs meet our criteria to be removed, our Medical Assistant will let you know when you can come in to the office to have those drains removed. If our Medical Assistant says the drain outputs are still too high, we will leave them in place and follow up in 4-5 days to see if your drains are ready to be taken out then.