

Breast Reconstruction Postoperative Instructions

Latissimus Dorsi & Expander/Implant

Immediately After Surgery:

- You will be in hospital for 5-7 days.
- Often, you will have drains from your breast and your back which removes any old blood or extra fluid from the operative sites. These drains will be reviewed regularly by Dr Vrtik during your hospital stay prior to removal.
- Prior to discharge, you will need to have minimal nausea and be able to do most daily activities without assistance. Your discomfort should also be manageable by oral tablets alone without injections.
- You will be discharged from hospital with pain killers and a course of antibiotics.

Pain Medication:

- Take 2x paracetamol tablets (Panamax or Panadol) every 6 hours regularly for the first 2-3 weeks.
- Take ibuprofen (nurofen or brufen) 400 mg with breakfast, lunch and dinner as required. Do not take ibuprofen on an empty stomach. Do not take ibuprofen if it is known to precipitate your asthma, or you have known allergic reactions to non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin, naproxen, naprosyn or feldene.
- For severe pain, take oxycodone (endone) if required.
- If your pain is severe and not relieved by your pain killers, please call the office (during working hours) or Dr Vrtik directly (if after hours).

Hygiene:

- Shower daily over your wound/surgical tapes and pat dry
- Use a hairdryer on a cool setting to dry stubborn areas such as areas under your arms or under your breasts.
- Wear your elastic vest at all times between showers, including while you are sleeping. Your vest can be washed and left out to dry (do not put in dryer!).

Sleeping:

You can sleep in whichever position that you are comfortable in, however, most patients are unable to lie on their sides for approximately 2 -3 weeks. To ensure a good night sleep, take your pain medications prior to sleeping. It is not unusual to be particularly sleepy and tired after an operation or an anaesthetic. Rest is very important after any breast surgery, so take time to rest as needed.

Diet:

Recovering from anaesthesia is like recovering from the flu. Start with clear liquids; then advance to soft, non-spicy foods over the next 2 days. Nausea and vomiting is not uncommon after surgery, the most important thing to do is drink plenty of fluids during this period to keep your body hydrated.

Activity:

- You should rest quietly for the first 48 hours.
- Regular walks around the ward are encouraged to prevent clots in the legs; start with short trips, progressing to longer trips around the hospital.

- ‘Potter’ around for the first week after discharge, gradually increase your daily activity as tolerated.
- The post operative period can be an emotional time, feeling teary is normal and will pass.
- Avoid bending over, lifting (anything over 1 kg), pushing, pulling or straining for at least 6 weeks (this includes house work, lifting children, groceries etc). Do not do activities requiring any force or repetitive motion of your upper limbs. ‘Overdoing’ things will result in an increase in swelling.
- Do not lift your arms above your head for the first 2 weeks. Be gentle when you start to lift your arms - with slow controlled movements. Often, quick movements of the arm can result in sharp, stabbing or pulling pain. Heavy and repetitive activities with your arms above the head are NOT recommended for the first 6 weeks.
- No driving for two weeks. After two weeks, you should be able to drive when you can turn and look over your shoulder comfortably - so that you can change lanes safely
- Gentle walking is good exercise. You may be able to start exercising at 25% of your normal level after 6 weeks, graduate your level progressively over the following 4 weeks. Make sure you wear a supportive bra (with no wires) during your exercises for the first 3 months.
- Most patients with desk jobs can return to work after 4 weeks, but those with more manual jobs (especially repetitive arm movements) need a minimum of 6-8 weeks off work.

Temperature:

A low-grade fever up to 37.5 degrees Celsius for 1-2 days is normal. Your temperature should be normal when you leave hospital. Call the office if:

- Your temperature is 38 degrees Celsius or over.
- You feel feverish, chills, or unwell

Swelling:

Swelling reaches its peak at 48-72 hours after surgery. Bruising can be a range of colours from dark purple, green to yellow. Give your body at least 2 weeks for the bruises to start fading and 3 months for the swelling to disappear. If your swelling is associated with severe pain and pressure, or if it is rapidly enlarging, please contact us. The shape, size and appearance of your breast can take up to 3-6 months to settle, longer if progressive expansion of your tissue-expander is required.

Clothing & Bras:

- You need to wear your vest until Dr Vrtik advises you otherwise. The vest prevents accumulation of fluid within your breast and your back.
- After the vest can be discarded, you will need to wear a soft cup supportive bra for 3 months.
- DO NOT wear an underwire bra for at least 3 months (the wires will change the shape of your breast, push your implants or tissue expanders upwards and also irritate the scar, encouraging prominent scar formation).

Follow-up:

- Your first follow-up is usually 5-7 days after discharge from hospital for review of your wounds, the surgical tape and also for any accumulation of fluid in your back or breast (seroma). Make sure you call the office to establish date and time if you have not already received your first post-operative appointment on discharge from the hospital.
- If you have a tissue expander in situ, Dr Vrtik will start expanding when she is satisfied with your wound healing. Expansion is usually weekly or fortnightly depending on your comfort level and tightness of your operative area.

- You are encouraged to contact rooms at any stage if you have any concerns prior to your next appointment.

Wound and Scar Management:

- Your wound will be covered with a purplish, clear tape that can be showered and pat dry. The tape will be removed at 3 weeks after the operation. Sometimes, fixomil (white fabric tape) will be applied to your wound after your surgical tapes have been removed.
- Scar Massage: You can start massaging along the scar at 3 weeks. Use your fingers or thumb, press firmly and massage in a rotating motion along the scar (over the tape if you have this in place). It should only take approximately 5 minutes. Regular massage at least 5-6 times a day is recommended for 3 months.

What to Expect after Breast Reconstruction Surgery:

- While your breast is swollen in the first few weeks, they may appear to be very big, very firm and high on your chest wall. Allow at least 3 months (or longer if you are having tissue expansion) for the shape and size to settle.
- Your skin will be irritated and sensitive after surgery. You should avoid the sun, and use a gentle cleanser and moisturiser.
- A breast reconstruction does not produce new breast with sensation – so the breast will not ‘feel’ like a breast to you. The skin over your new breast will be numb which is permanent. Sometimes sensation may grow into the area from surrounding skin - when the nerve recovers (especially in your scar), you may experience tingling, pins & needles, buzzing, or electric shock sensation periodically in the breast. This is expected, and will disappear after a few months. Sharp, stabbing pain may also occur, especially at the outer part of the breast, this is usually due to irritation to the nerves near the ribs; again, this is normal and will settle with time.
- Sometimes, the skin will appear irregular, puckered and pleated around the suture lines. All this will take time to smooth out as the scar relaxes and the deep sutures dissolve. Again, massaging of the scar is important to help these settle.
- It is important that you contact the rooms (and not your GP!) at any stage if you have questions or concerns. We need to be fully aware of any problems you may be having, and our nurses are experienced in postoperative care; they are more than happy to help with any queries or concerns you may have, and will be able to organise an appropriate urgent appointment for you if required.

Please Contact Us if:

- You develop a fever or become unwell.
- You develop spreading redness/rash over the operative area or suture lines.
- You feel fluid build up in your breast or back or if you notice sudden swelling either area.
- You have pain which is not relieved or controlled by your pain-killers.
- You have sudden copious discharge of fluid or oozing from your wounds.

Contact Telephone Numbers:

During Office Hours and Non-Urgent Matters – 3353 6165

After hours and for Emergencies only – 0421739149

