

Breast Reconstruction Postoperative Instructions

Tissue Expanders

Immediately After Surgery:

- You will be in hospital for 5-7 days.
- Often, you will have drains from your breast which removes any old blood or extra fluid from the operative sites. These drains will be reviewed regularly by Dr Vrtik during your hospital.
- Prior to discharge, you will need to have minimal nausea and be able to do most daily activities without assistance. All your drains must be removed. 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.
- Be gentle when you lift your arms above your head for the first two weeks. 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 2 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.

Clothing & Bras:

- You need to wear your vest until Dr Vrtik advises you otherwise. The vest prevents accumulation of fluid within your breast.
- 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 while you have tissue expanders.

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 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.
- 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:

- You will have fixomil tape over your wound when you are discharged from the hospital. This should be changed weekly for 4 weeks.

- Scar Massage: You can start massaging along the scar at 4 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.
- Your skin will be irritated and sensitive after surgery. You should avoid the sun, and use a gentle cleanser and moisturiser.

What to Expect after Breast Reconstruction Surgery:

- When the tissue expander is first inserted, it usually has some fluid in it, but not enough to give an appearance of a breast. Do not be surprised if your chest is flat to start with. Once the expansion starts, a resemblance of a breast will slowly develop.
- 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.
- 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.
- Once the expander has been fully expanded, it can feel very hard and firm. This will soften over the next two months. Allowing this pocket to soften is important prior to the second stage surgery. The permanent implants are much softer than the expander.
- The expander can be uncomfortable because it is hard and not elastic. The gel implants is always much more comfortable. The discomfort associated with the expanders will disappear after the second stage surgery. If you have excessive pain or discomfort after an expansion (which is not responsive to pain killers), please call the rooms – you may have been ‘over-expanded’ and need some fluid removed.
- It is not unusual to have some ‘sloshing’ sensation or noise from your breast when you exercise or movement around. This will not happen once the expander is replaced by the implant.
- 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

