

# Breast Reconstruction Postoperative Instructions

## Tissue Expander – Implant Exchange

### Immediately After Surgery:

- You will be in hospital for 1-3 days.
- Often, you will have a drain from your breast which removes any old blood or extra fluid from the operative site. The drain 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. Your drain 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:

If you have been sent home with your dressings intact with foam tape:

- Do not use a shower on your torso; sponging and towelling around your dressings should be adequate. Showering the lower half of your body is okay. DO NOT get your dressings wet.
- If you would like to wash your hair, do it with your head tipped back at the basin with help (going to the hairdresser is a very good option).
- If the corners of the tapes are starting to lift – trim it back so the corners sit flat on your skin.
- If your dressings are falling off, or becoming excessively itchy – contact the office for an earlier appointment with our nurses.
- Your first postoperative appointment will be 5-7 days, at which time your dressings will be removed. BRING YOUR BRA with you to this appointment.

After your dressings have been removed at 5-7days: OR

If you have been sent home without your dressings, but in the postoperative bra or vest :

- Shower daily over surgical tapes and pat dry
- Use a hairdryer on a cool setting to dry stubborn areas such under your arms or under your breasts.
- Wear your bra or vest at all times between showers.

### Sleeping:

You can sleep in whichever position that you are comfortable in, however, most patients are unable to lie on their sides for approximately 1-2 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. If your nausea and vomiting persists after 48 hours, please contact us.

**Activity:**

- You should rest quietly for the first 24 hours.
- Regular walks around the ward or home are encouraged to prevent clots in the legs.
- 'Potter' around for the first 2 weeks after discharge, gradually increase your daily activity as tolerated.
- Avoid bending over, lifting (anything over 1 kg), pushing, pulling or straining for at least 4 weeks (this includes house work, lifting children, groceries etc). During this time, do not do activities requiring any force or repetitive motion of your upper limbs. 'Overdoing' things will result in an increase in swelling.
- No driving for one week.
- Gentle walking is good exercise. You may be able to start exercising at 25% of your normal level after 4 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 1 week, but those with more manual jobs (especially repetitive arm movements) need a minimum of 3-4 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:**

- If you have a vest, you need to wear this until Dr Vrtik advises you otherwise. The vest prevents accumulation of fluid within your breast.
- Wear a soft cup supportive bra at all times for a minimum of 6 weeks. After this, you can sleep without the bra. DO NOT wear an underwire bra for at least 3 months.

**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.

- Your next appointment is usually at 2-3 months when the position of your implant will be reassessed. Options in regards to any further revisions will be discussed with you if required.
- You are encouraged to contact rooms at any stage if you have any concerns prior to your next appointment.

#### **Wound and Scar Management:**

- Your sutures will be trimmed and the surgical tape changed at 7-10 days after surgery. Fixomil tape will be applied over your wound to prevent stretching of your scar. 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.
- Breast massage should start two weeks after surgery. Using the palms of your hand, firmly sweep and push your breast inwards twice, downwards twice and upwards once. Then, using the flats of your fingers together, firmly massage your breast over all four quadrants. Repeat this cycle for five minutes and for five times during the day. This need to be continued for 3 months.

#### **What to Expect after Breast Reconstruction Surgery:**

- 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.
- The breast may feel very firm in the first few weeks. The breast massage will help with softening of the breast tissue around the implant. This can take up to three months.
- 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

