

Mastectomy Post Operation Patient Packet

**YOUR GUIDE TO RECOVERY
FOLLOWING BREAST CANCER SURGERY**

Post-Operative Instructions from Your Surgeon

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TYPES OF SURGERY

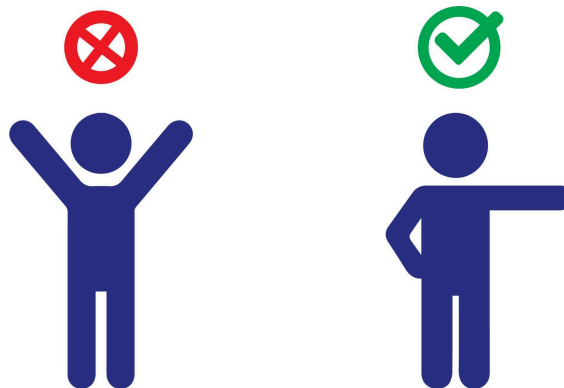
Mastectomy:

- This procedure removes the breast, and sometimes the underarm lymph nodes, and the lining over the chest muscle.
- You will go home with a bulky dressing covering your incision. The incision is closed with dissolvable sutures inside and steri-strips (paper tape) on the outer skin.
- Following surgery you will have a drain, which is a soft plastic tube with small holes in it, coming out of the skin below the incision. The drain will help create suction that holds the skin down against the muscle until it heals. Fluid will come out of the drain. Initially there will be a little blood. You will be emptying the drain as needed. Keep drain attached to clothing with a safety pin.
- **Drain Care:** To empty the drain, you must undo the top and pour out the fluid in a drain container. Please record the date, time and amount of fluid removed on the attached **Drain Output Flow Sheet**. To restart the suction function of the drain, squeeze the bottle and while squeezing it, put the top back on. The drain functions only when the bottle is squeezed and "compressed."
- Bring the **Drain Output Flow Sheet** with you to your post-operative appointment. You must be draining less than 30ml per day for the drain to be removed. This usually happens about 7-10 days after surgery.
- You may shower or bathe 24 hours after your drain is removed. Before showering, remove the bulky dressing and leave the steri-strips intact. The steri-strips may get wet. If they loosen or come off, there is no need to worry. Your incision will not open up. After you shower, you may apply a clean dry dressing to the area if desired.
- It is normal and expected to experience some soreness, pain, swelling, numbness and skin tightness after surgery. Take the pain medication prescribed by your doctor as directed and follow recommendations in the **Managing Symptoms** section of this manual.
- Do not use any deodorant or shave on the surgery side until given the "okay" from your doctor (usually six weeks after surgery). You may use cornstarch or powder instead.
- Do not lift anything heavy or engage in any strenuous activity during the first 6-8 weeks after surgery including aerobic and resistive exercise until you have been given the "okay" to do so by your doctor.
- Arm exercises after surgery are necessary to help you regain motion and strength. Exercises can also reduce pain and stiffness in the shoulder, neck and back. Follow the Guidelines for Activity and Exercise and specific **Exercises for Week 1 and Week 2**, outlined in the **REHABILITATION** manual.



INSTRUCTIONS TO FOLLOW AFTER DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL

- Your post-operative appointment was scheduled at the time your surgery was scheduled. If you need to change the appointment, call **732-846-3300**.
- Contact the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department to set up your appointment with a Physical Therapist/Certified Lymphedema Therapist at **732-745-8570**, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am-5:30 pm. Your doctor will give you a referral at your post-operative visit if needed.
- You must have someone drive you home from the hospital.
- You may not drive for at least 24 hours after surgery, and if on pain medication, you cannot drive while taking these medications.
- Do not consume alcoholic beverages while on pain medication or antibiotics.
- Limit your physical activity for the next 24 hours.
- You can resume your normal diet by increasing food and drinks gradually as tolerated.
- Refer to your **REHABILITATION** manual for:
 - *Guidelines for Activity and Exercise*
 - *Resuming Activities after Breast Surgery*
 - *Exercises for Week 1 and Week 2*
- **DO NOT LIFT YOUR ARM ABOVE SHOULDER HEIGHT FOR THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS OR UNTIL YOUR DRAIN HAS BEEN REMOVED.**





WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

- ✓ You may feel more tired than normal.
- ✓ You may experience mild to moderate discomfort or pain after surgery. This is normal and may be relieved by following suggestions in the **Managing Symptoms** section of this manual. The exercises and breathing techniques described in the **REHABILITATION** manual are also very helpful in improving your comfort.
- ✓ You may also experience mild nausea and loss of appetite. This usually resolves in a short period of time after surgery. It is important that you try and eat small frequent meals after surgery and drink plenty of fluids.
- ✓ When lymph nodes are removed, you may see swelling under the arm. This is normal. It is a collection of fluid in the body that will reabsorb on its own and the area will become flat. You may also notice while moving or turning that you hear a water or wave-like sound in the breast which is normal. This fluid is called serum and may leak out of the breast incision.
- ✓ After removing the bulk bandage, your incision may look swollen and you may feel sensations in the breast like pulling or burning. This is normal and all part of the healing process after surgery.
- ✓ At the end of your incision line, you may feel a piece of thread sticking out. This is the end of your suture line and will fall off on its own in approximately 30-45 days.

WHAT NOT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

If you should experience any of the symptoms below, contact the office and speak with the nurse: **732-846-3300**.

- ❗ Temperature of 101 or above.
- ❗ Pain that is not relieved by medication.
- ❗ Severe swelling or redness of the breast.
- ❗ Foul smelling discharge of the breast.
- ❗ Bandages that are soaked through with bright red blood.



MANAGING DISCOMFORT

It is normal to feel mild to moderate discomfort following surgery. The following suggestions can help ease your symptoms and make you feel more comfortable.

What can I do?

Pain

- Take the pain medication prescribed by your doctor as directed.
- An icepack placed in the armpit may help decrease discomfort and swelling after lymph node dissection.
- **DO NOT APPLY HEAT PACK OR MOIST HEAT TO AFFECTED SIDE.**
- Follow instructions **Breathing for Relaxation and Pain Relief** in the **REHABILITATION** Manual.

Stiffness

- Performing daily stretches and range of motion exercises as described in the **REHABILITATION** manual will reduce stiffness, increase circulation and decrease pain.
- **DO NOT APPLY HEAT PACK OR MOIST HEAT TO AFFECTED SIDE.**

Swelling

- **Armpit or chest wall:** Place a small pillow, or folded towel under your armpit or between your arm and chest wall to provide added compression.
- **Hand or arm:** Follow **Exercises to Relieve Swelling in the Arm and the Hand** in the **REHABILITATION** manual.
- Call your doctor if your swelling does not improve or becomes painful, red, or hot.

Stress, Anxiety, Muscle Tension

- Muscle tension, stress, anxiety and pain can be reduced by following techniques described in **Breathing for Relaxation and Pain Relief** in the **REHABILITATION** manual.