

Dr Habib J. Khoury
PLASTIC AND RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER BREAST RECONSTRUCTION

This pamphlet was created to give the patients a general idea of what to expect with breast reconstruction surgery and facilitate planning their general recovery period. Most hospitals offer free items which are helpful during the recovery period. One of these items is a breast surgery bag that contains a bra, bags to carry post operative drains, seat belt pillows and a soft prosthesis. You should visit a local cancer center located near you to request your bag prior to surgery.

**IF YOU ARE HAVING RECONSTRUCTION WITH A TISSUE EXPANDER
EXPECT THE FOLLOWING:**

Expected time off from work is generally 4 to 6 weeks depending on your occupation and this should be discussed with your surgeon prior to surgery.

You will be in the hospital for 24-48 hours after surgery. You will be discharged with antibiotics, pain medication and a stool softener. Once home call Dr Khoury's office to schedule the first post operative follow up for a week to 10 days.

You will be discharged wearing a surgical bra with padding at the surgery site.

You are expected to wear that bra all the time even while sleeping except when showering. You will be expected to wear a bra for 30 days twenty four hours a day. After the first week you can switch to a soft cup cotton sports type bra that hooks in the front for support. The tissue expander will most likely be filled with a small amount of saline at the time of the operation. It will most likely feel tight.

There will be one or two drains per mastectomy site under the arm to limit fluid collections which normally happen at the operated site. You will be instructed on how to care for the drains prior to discharge from the hospital. These drains need to be emptied and measured twice a day and recorded on a drain record. They also need to be "milked" or "stripped" twice a day. The hospital staff will show you how to do this prior to discharge. Bring the drain record with you to all post-op visits. The timing of drain removal will be determined by your total daily drain output.

Typically the tissue expander is filled for the first time at about the third post-operative week and every two weeks there after until the desired size is reached. In some instances it may need to be filled on a weekly basis. This process can take 2 to 3 months.

ACTIVITY:

The first few days at home you should alternate periods of rest with some activity such as walking around the house. Do not over do it.

Propping yourself on a couple of pillows may be more comfortable for sleeping and sitting around than laying down flat. Do not sleep on the operated side.

Maintain the arm(s) on the operated side(s) at or below shoulder level. Do not raise your hands above the head, except to comb or wash your hair and brush your teeth.

Do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk or 5 lbs for the first 30 days. Do not vacuum, or do any work which requires heavy repetitive movement.

Do not drive for the first 2 weeks and not while taking narcotic pain medicine.

The pain medicine can be constipating despite the stool softener prescribed on discharge from the hospital. You should have a bowel movement within 5 days of surgery and may need a laxative such as milk of magnesia, dulcolax tablets or a Fleets enema.

The second week you will be feeling better and may be able to go out for a few hours accompanied by someone. Again pace yourself.

You may shower after 48 hours. To avoid pulling out your J-P drains pin them to a pair of pantyhose tied to the waist like a belt.

The Reach to Recovery booklet containing exercises for after breast surgery will be provided during one of the post op visits 30 days after surgery. These exercises should not be started until 30 days after surgery.

IF YOU ARE HAVING RECONSTRUCTION WITH A LATISSIMUS FLAP:

Expect to be off from work 6 to 8 weeks depending on your occupation. This should be discussed with your surgeon prior to surgery.

Expect to stay in the hospital 3 to 5 days. Then on discharge call Dr. Khoury's office to schedule a follow up appointment for 7 to 10 days after surgery. You will be discharged with antibiotics, pain medication and a stool softener.

There will be drains on the surgery side towards the back as well as under the arm to limit fluid collections. There is always some swelling and even bruising. The drain entrance sites may be padded for comfort. The hospital staff will teach you how to strip or milk the drains as well as measure and record their output twice a day prior to discharge. Bring the drain record with you to all office visits after surgery.

Postoperatively you will not be wearing a bra and will be asked not to wear one for 30 days. Later on you will be wearing a soft cotton sports bra for support but NO Under wires. This prevents pressure on the flap. Wear comfortable loose clothing.

ACTIVITY:

Once at home, alternate periods of rest with activity. Propping yourself on a couple of pillows is more comfortable than lying flat and prevents some of the swelling. The underarm on the operated side may feel much fuller than the other side. This is normal. Do not sleep on the operated side.

Do not lift the arm on the operated side above your head, except to wash or comb your hair and brush your teeth. Do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk or use that arm to vacuum or do any housework until released by your surgeon to do so which could be 4 to 6 weeks.

You should have a bowel movement within 5 days after surgery and may need to take a laxative such as milk of magnesia, dulcolax tablets or a Fleets enema despite having taken the stool softener.

The second week you may be feeling better and could go out for short trips. Pace yourself.

You can increase your activity as the weeks go by.

Do not drive for the first two weeks and not until you stop taking all narcotic pain medicine.

You may shower after 48 hours. To avoid pulling out your J-P drains wear a pair of pantyhose like a belt and pin the drains to it.

Do not wear a bra until released by your surgeon to do so. Usually you can wear one 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. This is to prevent any tight or under wire bras from cutting off circulation to the breast flap.

Do not exercise, use a treadmill or power walk until released by your surgeon. You need about 6 to 8 weeks for the back incision to heal before attempting any of this. You can resume normal exercise activities and lifting at about 3 months after surgery. Do not start any vigorous activity or exercise without discussing it

with your surgeon. You may however after 30 days request the Reach for Recovery booklet with after breast surgery exercises and start doing them

If there is a tissue expander under the flap this will generally be expanded at 2 week intervals starting at about the third week after surgery.

IF YOU ARE HAVING RECONSTRUCTION WITH A TRAM FLAP;

Expect to be off from work about 6 to 8 weeks depending on your occupation and work load. You should discuss this with your surgeon prior to surgery.

Expect to stay in the hospital 4to7 days. On discharge call Dr Khoury's office to schedule the first post-op follow-up appointment 7 to 10 days after surgery.

You will be discharged with pain medication, antibiotics and a stool softener.

There will be 1 drain under the arm of the operated breast side and 2 in the lower tummy below the belly button. These need to be emptied twice a day and their output recorded on the drain record. The hospital staff will teach you how to do this as well as "milk" or strip them prior to discharge. Bring the drain record with you to all post-op appointments.

Expect the reconstructed breast to appear fuller than anticipated because of swelling. Expect swelling and bruising of the underarm area, as well as, the tummy. This takes a couple of weeks to totally resolve.

You will be asked to walk around bent over at the waist and should do so for the first 2 weeks. After that you can slowly straighten up.

Postoperatively you will NOT BE WEARING A BRA and will be asked not to wear one for the first 30 days. This prevents putting pressure on the new breast flap. After that a cotton soft cup sports type bra should be worn to provide support. No under wire bras are allowed.

ACTIVITY:

The first week home from the hospital plan to stay indoors, alternating periods of light activity with rest. Do not do any housework. The second week after your first post operative visit you can plan short trips out of less than 2 hours.

You may shower after 48 hours. To avoid pulling out your J-P drains wear a pair of pantyhose as a belt and pin your drains to.

Do not lift the arm(s) on the operated side above your head except to wash and comb your hair and brush your teeth. At 30 days after surgery you should request the Reach for Recovery after breast surgery exercise booklet and start them slowly.

Do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk or 5 lbs at the most. This restriction applies for 4 weeks.

Do not drive for 3 weeks and/or until you are no longer taking narcotic pain medication.

Do not use a treadmill, power walk or exercise until released to do so by your surgeon. For 3 months you will not be allowed to do sit-ups, weight lift or go to the GYM. After 3 months your exercise activity can be reviewed and started gradually. This is to allow the abdomen to heal.

CALL THE OFFICE IF:

There is redness at the tissue expander/breast flap area.

Undue swelling, redness, drainage or the incision splits open.

You are having reactions to the pain medicine or it doesn't relieve the pain

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You have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or the inability to have a bowel movement despite having taken the stool softener and or a laxative.

You develop fever of 101 degrees (38.2 C) or more for two days.

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