

# **Taking care of yourself after breast reconstruction surgery**

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## **Pain medication**

- You will be given a prescription for a narcotic which is pain medication. **Do not drive while using narcotics.**
- Narcotics tend to cause constipation. Drinking lots of fluids, eating foods high in fibre (fruits, vegetables and whole grains) and taking a stool softener will help. We suggest Colace (over-the-counter) 100 mg tablets twice per day.

## **Antibiotics**

- You will be given a prescription for antibiotics. While you have a drain(s), you must take the antibiotics. You can stop the antibiotics 24 hours after the last drain is removed. If you are running out and the drains are still in, please call the office for a refill.
- Antibiotics may cause stomach discomfort or diarrhea. You may want to think about taking a probiotic while you are taking the antibiotics. Probiotics can be found in health food stores or grocery stores.

To read more about probiotics, go to the website EatRight Ontario  
<http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Probiotics/prebiotics/The-Pros-of-Probiotics.aspx>

## **Follow-up appointment**

- You should be seen in about 2 to 3 weeks after you leave the hospital. Please call your surgeon's office to make your follow-up appointment.

## Home care

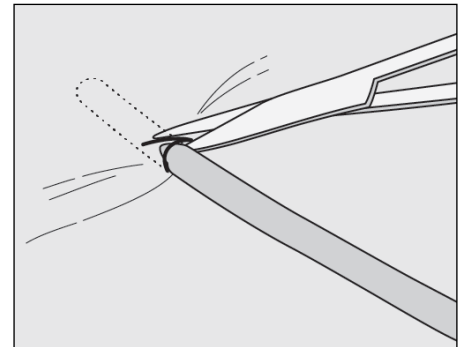
- Home care is provided by the **H**amilton **N**iagara **H**aldimand **B**rant **L**ocal **H**ealth **I**ntegrated **N**etwork (HNHB LHIN). This will be arranged for you.
- A nurse will visit your home every day to change your dressings and record the drainage from your drains.
- Your drains have been secured very close to the skin.
- Most drains stay in for about 1 to 2 weeks. Some may come out earlier, and others may be in up to 4 weeks.
- For removal of the drains, please provide these instructions to your nurse (next page).

## Instructions for nurse to remove drains

Sometimes there is no air knot.

To loosen the drain suture please cut the suture directly on the drain and perpendicular to the drain, as shown in the picture.

The suture should release when you do this. Do not worry about cutting a hole in the drain as it is coming out anyway.



When removing drains:

- Do not remove more than one drain in an area. For example, if there are 2 drains in one breast, only remove one drain a day, even if both drain bulbs are dry.
- More than one drain may be removed on the same day if they are in different areas, such as one drain is in the abdomen and the other drain is in the breast.

## Implants and expanders – special care

### Shower/wound

- You may shower on the third day after surgery. Do not immerse in a bath until the drains have been out for 48 hours (2 days). Sponge baths are allowed in this time period.
- You may have paper tape over your wounds. They can stay on for about 5 days and then can be removed.

If needed, the tape may be replaced if it starts to come off or soaked with blood. You can buy the tape at a drug store. If you do not have tape, you can cover the wound with some gauze.

### Activity

- Avoid moderate to heavy activity above your shoulder for about 6 weeks.

For specific exercises, see the handout "[Exercises after breast or upper body lymph node surgery](#)".

### Bra

- If you are having your final implant surgery, please buy a comfortable bra. The ideal bra opens at the front and is wire free. You will need to wear the bra for 6 weeks all the time. You can take the bra off to have a shower.

Mastectomy bras and after reconstruction bras/garments can be expensive. Extended health coverage/insurance plans may cover these costs.

Make sure to check!

### **Return to work**

- Two surgeries are needed and there are several office visits for the expansion. You may expect a 6 week recovery period after each surgery. No work related activities after each surgery.
- You may need 1 to 2 days off work with each expansion as you may be sore.
- We can provide you with a letter for work and insurance purposes. The letter will show the process and recovery timeframes.

### **Emergency**

If you have any of these problems, please go to Emergency:

- Infections: A reddish or pink hue which spreads away from the incision line. Start taking antibiotics if you have any left.
- You can see the implant (implant extrusion/exposure): The incision has opened and the expander or implant is exposed.

## **DIEP (Own Tissue) – special care**

### **Shower/wound**

It is okay to shower, even if you have drains.

- You may have paper tape over your wounds. They can stay on for about 5 days and then can be removed. If needed, the tape may be replaced if it starts to come off or soaked with blood. You can buy the tape at a drug store. If you do not have tape, you can cover the wound with some gauze.
- You may notice that there is quite a bit of wrinkling across your wounds. Do not be alarmed, this is normal and will slowly go away over several weeks.

### **Activity**

- For 10 to 12 weeks, avoid moderate to heavy activity. Especially activities that use your stomach muscles such as sit-ups or crunches.
- If there is a big change in the colour of your flap (bluish/purple) please contact your surgeon right away:

Juravinski Hospital Paging:  
905-521-5030

St. Joseph's Healthcare, Paging:  
905-522-1155, ext. 33311

### **Compression garment**

- The binder that you have over your stomach area can be changed with any compression type garment such as Spanx.

Wearing a compression garment is up to you. Many patients find the support of wearing a compression garment helpful for up to 3 months.

### **Bra**

- Please buy a comfortable bra. The ideal bra opens at the front and is wire free. You will need to wear the bra for 6 weeks all the time. You can take the bra off to have a shower.

Mastectomy bras and after reconstruction bras/garments can be expensive. Extended health coverage/insurance plans may cover these costs. Make sure to check!

### **Return to work**

- You may expect about 3 months of recovery time. No work related activities during this time.
- We can provide you with a letter for work and insurance purposes. The letter will show the process and recovery timeframes.
- The recovery timeframes will vary between patients and may change if there are complications related to the surgery.

### **Emergency**

If you have any of these problems, please go to Emergency:

- Sudden change in colour of the flap skin. This may mean there is a clot in the vein or artery of the flap.
- Shortness of breath or one leg starts to swell. This could be a blood clot in the leg called DVT (deep vein thrombosis) or a blood clot in the lung (pulmonary embolus).

### **Websites to consider**

- [www.breastreconstructioncanada.ca](http://www.breastreconstructioncanada.ca)
- [www.breastreconstruction.org](http://www.breastreconstruction.org)
- [www.plasticsurgery.ca](http://www.plasticsurgery.ca)
- [www.bethechoice.org](http://www.bethechoice.org)
- **Reconstruction and Nipple Areola Construction**

Patients often ask about nipple areola construction. There are many options, but nothing can happen until several months after a flap or implant.



## Services, programs and websites

There are many services provided that include after surgery exercises, counselling, nutritional and alternative medicine support, free transportation to appointments, breast inserts and medical equipment.

Please consider:

- Breast Cancer Support Services serving the greater Hamilton and Halton Regions  
[www.breastcancersupport.org/](http://www.breastcancersupport.org/)
- Cancer Assistance Program  
[www.cancerassist.ca](http://www.cancerassist.ca)
- Kelly Shires Breast Cancer Foundation  
[www.Kellyshiresfoundation.org](http://www.Kellyshiresfoundation.org)
- Patient and Family Resource Centre, Juravinski Cancer Centre  
<http://jcc.hhsc.ca/body.cfm?id=58>
- Wellspring Cancer Support Centre  
[www.wellspring.ca](http://www.wellspring.ca)
- Wellwood  
[www.wellwood.on.ca](http://www.wellwood.on.ca)
- YWCA Encore  
<http://ywcahamilton.org/programsand-services/ywcaencore>

## Contact information

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## Notes/questions

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