



Post-operative Instructions

DIET, TRAM, latissimus flap or tissue expander reconstruction

The following are general guidelines for patients who have undergone breast reconstruction. Specific instructions may vary from patient to patient if the circumstances dictate. Please feel free to call the office at **(312) 266-6240** or email us at **info@northwesternplastics.com** should you have any questions regarding this information.

MEDICATIONS

- You may resume taking your routine medications, unless your surgeon instructs you differently.
- Do not take any supplements, blood thinners or aspirin for 1 week after surgery unless instructed otherwise by your surgeon
- You will get a prescription for narcotic pain relief medications. Please refer to the **Pain Relief Medications after Procedures** document for more information on optimal use of pain relief medications
- Narcotic pain relievers cause constipation; make sure to take a stool softener such as Colace (over the counter) to reduce constipation
- If you're reconstruction involved an implant or tissue expander, you will be on an antibiotic for one week after surgery. If you did not receive this prescription, please call the office
- **PAIN PUMP**
 - Post-operatively you may have a local anesthesia pump (pain pump) in place to help control pain. It consists of a small tube with a bottle at the end containing marcaine (a local anesthetic)
 - Usually lasts 2-3 days
 - May shower with pain pump in place
 - When the inner balloon is empty, the medication is finished. You may remove and throw away the bottle. Remove the clear tape and steri-strips from the skin and gently pull the tubes out. This will not be painful. Be aware that the tubes are long.
 - **Leakage around the pain pump may occur.** This may be pink to red in color and is okay. You may leave the pain pump in place and reinforce the area with gauze to protect your clothing.

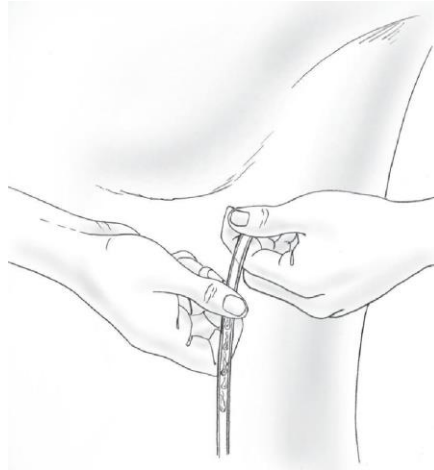
DRESSINGS

- You may remove the gauze dressing 24 hours after surgery and then shower
- Keep steri-strips in place; these will gradually loosen over time and usually fall off within 7-10 days of surgery
- You may continue to cover the incisions with gauze if you want to, but it is not necessary
- Minor swelling, numbness, and bruising of the breasts is normal and will resolve with time

DRAINS

- Please strip and empty the JP drain 2-3 times daily, or more often if the bulb fills up
- To strip the drain, firmly grasp the tubing closer to your body, and use your other hand to squeeze and slowly slide your thumb and index finger down the tube. Always stabilize the tube

with one hand while stripping the tube with the other. After emptying the drains, squeeze the bottle to create suction and replace the cap while squeezing to maintain the vacuum.



- Measure and record drain output for each drain during every 24 hour period, and bring your record to your post-operative appointment
- After the drainage has decreased to 30 mL or less in a 24-hour period, please call our office to arrange a time for removal of the drains 312-266-6240
- Drains are usually removed within 1-2 weeks
- Drains can get wet in the shower, but should be supported while showering. To secure JP drains, used a ribbon, shoestring, or lanyard around the neck
- It is normal to have some redness, about the size of a dime, at the drain site. If this increases, report this change.

BRA & CLOTHING INSTRUCTIONS

- Wearing a soft support bra (or ace wrap), even at night, may help ease any discomfort, but is not required
- Do not wear anything that is tight or uncomfortable. A garment that leaves marks on the skin is too tight
- **Please check with your surgeon prior to wearing an underwire bra.**
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing
- Try to choose clothes that button up or have zippers in the front for ease of dressing

DIET

- You should start resuming your normal diet gradually
- Drink plenty of fluids or water (eight 8 ounce glasses a day)
- Do not drink alcohol for 2 days after surgery or while taking narcotic pain medications

ACTIVITY

- **SHOWER:** You may **shower** beginning 24-48 hours after surgery. Clean incisions gently with soap and water and pat dry. Do not swim, bathe, use hot tubs, or use lotions or creams on the breast for 2 weeks after surgery or until the incisions have healed. Do not shave the affected underarm with a razor as your risk for injuring yourself is significantly higher due to numbness. Electric razors are okay.
- **ACTIVITY/ARM RANGE OF MOTION:** You may resume normal daily activities the day after surgery; this includes activities that encourage range of motion of the shoulder such

as washing or brushing your hair. As soon as you are able, you may begin the exercises included in this packet as stretching positions; this will help keep mobility without increasing drainage. Reach out in the direction of the exercise and hold the position for 5-10 seconds and then move to the next one. You may repeat this 3-4 times per day. You may begin **arm exercises** once the drains have been removed. Perform the exercises 3-4 times a day and gradually increase your range of motion and repetitions – ideally you should be working to reach a point at which you can fully raise your arms over your head. This will take time and repetition, so do not become frustrated.

- **EXERCISE, ACTIVITIES, SEXUAL ACTIVITY:** Walking is encouraged immediately post-operatively. Exercise that raises your heart rate and blood pressure should be avoided for 2 weeks post-operatively. You may resume aerobic exercise (bike riding, aerobics, etc) two to three weeks after surgery. Common sense and good judgment are essential in avoiding injury at this point; start light and build up slowly. Avoid chest specific exercises and running or jumping; for DIEP and TRAM patients, also avoid sit-ups and abdominal exercises. All type of exercise are permitted after 6 weeks
- **DRIVING:** You may resume driving when you are no longer taking narcotic pain medication during the day and you are able to sit comfortably behind the wheel and perform all motions necessary for safe driving. Always wear a seatbelt while in a car; use a pad or pillow on your chest if necessary for comfort.
- **LIFTING:** Do not lift anything that requires straining for six weeks. You may lift anything that does not require straining or struggling after discharge, but heavy lifting should be avoided for six weeks post-operatively.
- **RETURN TO WORK:** Actual return to work dates may vary; we will work to support you with this process. In general, average return to work times are as follows
 - tissue expander/implant reconstruction- 2-3 weeks
 - latissimus flap reconstruction- 4 weeks
 - free TRAM, DIEP- 6-8 weeks

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

- **DO NOT use a hot water bottle or electric heating pad** on your chest or abdomen until normal sensation returns as the risk for burns with the electric pad is substantially increased.
- If you would like additional support in increasing arm and shoulder mobility, Northwestern Memorial Hospital offers multiple fitness and wellness classes that may be of help. To learn more about current offerings or to register, visit the website at classes.nmh.org/listing/all, or call 312-926-8400. Most classes meet in Streeterville on the Northwestern Memorial Hospital campus unless otherwise noted. Be sure to check with your surgeon/doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Look at your incisions once a day to note any signs of infection:
- **SIGNS of INFECTION** include:
 - Incision area becoming red and warm to the touch.
 - Drainage leaking from incision site that is cloudy or pus-like.
 - Excessive swelling. Or more swelling on one side or the other

FOLLOW UP

- Call the office for an appointment within a week after your surgery at 312-266-6240
- **WHEN TO CALL THE SURGEON OR OFFICE**
 - Fever over 101 or higher for 2 readings taken 4 hours apart.
 - Marked increase in redness, swelling, or pain around incision.

- Any excessive bleeding or drainage from your incisions.
- Pain is not relieved by prescription medication.
- Persistent problems with nausea or vomiting
- CHEST PAIN or TROUBLE BREATHING: CALL 911 or go to an Emergency Room

We look forward to seeing you back in the office and are available should you need anything! Please feel free to call us or email us anytime with questions or concerns. After hours, we have an answering service that can connect you with an on-call physician any hour of the day or night. If you send us an email after hours or on the weekends, we will do our best to get back to you in a timely manner (usually within 12 hours). Additionally, frequently asked questions and answers can be found on the website under "F.A.Q".

312-266-6240

info@northwesternplastics.com

www.northwesternplastics.com

Bulb Drain Record

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

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24-hour Total			

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24-hour Total			

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24-hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24-hour Total			

