

Postoperative Instructions:

Latissimus Dorsi & Expander/Implant Breast Reconstruction

Immediately After Surgery:

- You will be in hospital for 5-7 days.
- You will have drains from your breast and your back which removes any old blood or extra fluid from the operative sites. These drains will be reviewed regularly by your surgeon during your hospital stay.
- Prior to discharge:
 - You will need to be able to perform self-care with minimal assistance.
 - Your discomfort should be manageable by oral tablets alone without injections.
 - Your drains have been removed. Sometimes, you might go home with just one drain in situ.
 - You have opened your bowels
- You will be discharged from hospital with pain killers and the remaining 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.
- You will be prescribed strong pain killers such as Oxycodone (Endone), Tramadol or Palexia. Take these as instructed, but only if you have severe pain. Remember to keep up with your laxatives or fibre supplements if you are taking pain killers.

Hygiene:

- Shower daily over your wound/surgical tapes and pat dry
- Use a hairdryer on a cool setting to dry stubborn areas such as areas under your arms or under your breasts.
- Wear your elastic vest at all times between showers, including while you are sleeping. Your vest can be washed and left out to dry (do not put in dryer!). It is likely that you will need to wear this vest for approximately 2 weeks after discharge.

Sleeping:

You can sleep in whichever position that you are comfortable in, however, most patients are unable to lie on their sides for approximately 2 -3 weeks. You are able to lie on your back wound to sleep. 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 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 are not uncommon after surgery, the most important thing to do is drink plenty of fluids during this period to keep your body hydrated.

It is also important to make sure that you take fibre supplements and/or laxative as prescribed to help with your bowel motions. It is very common to become quite constipated after surgery due to a combination of anaesthetic drugs and pain-fillers.

Activity:

- You should rest quietly for the first 24 hours.
- Regular walks around the ward are encouraged to prevent clots in the legs; start with short trips, progressing to longer trips around the hospital.
- The post operative period can be an emotional time, feeling teary is normal and will pass.
- Avoid lifting (anything over 500g), pushing, pulling, reaching or straining of your arms for at least 6 weeks (this includes house work, lifting children, groceries etc). Do not do activities requiring any force or repetitive motion of your upper limbs. 'Overdoing' things will result in an increase in swelling, fluid accumulation, wound separation and pain.
- Be gentle when you start to lift your arms - with slow controlled movements. Often, quick movements of the arm can result in sharp, stabbing or pulling pain. Heavy and repetitive activities with your arms above the head are not recommended for the first 6 weeks.
- No driving for two weeks. After two weeks, you should be able to drive when you can turn and look over your shoulder comfortably - so that you can change lanes safely
- Gentle walking is good exercise in the first 6 weeks. You may be able to start exercising at 25% of your normal level after 6 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 4 weeks, but those with more manual jobs (especially repetitive or heavy arm movements) required a minimum of 6-8 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 2-3 days 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. The shape, size and appearance of your breast can take up to 3-6 months to settle, longer if progressive expansion of your tissue-expander is required.

Clothing & Bras:

- You need to wear your vest until advised. The vest prevents accumulation of fluid within your breast and your back. This is usually for 2-3 weeks after surgery.
- After the vest can be discarded, you will need to wear a soft cup supportive bra for 3 months.
- DO NOT wear an underwire bra for at least 3 months (the wires will change the shape of your breast, push your implants or tissue expanders upwards and also irritate the scar, encouraging prominent scar formation).

Follow-up:

- Your first follow-up appointment is usually 5-7 days after discharge from hospital. At this time, our experienced nurse will check your wounds, change the surgical tapes if required, and also check for any accumulation of fluid in your back or 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.
- If you have a tissue expander in situ, we will start expanding once your wounds have healed and you are comfortable without the need for regular pain-killers. This is usually around 4-6 weeks after surgery.
- Expansion is usually weekly or fortnightly depending on your comfort level and tightness of your operative area.
- You are encouraged to contact rooms at any stage if you have any concerns prior to your next appointment.

Wound and Scar Management:

- Your wound will be covered with a faint purplish, clear tape that can be showered and pat dry. The tape will be removed at 3 weeks after the operation. Fixomull/Hypafix tape will then be applied to your wound for support. You will need to change these tapes weekly.
- 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.

Your Implants: (this section does not apply to tissue expanders)

- If you have had a permanent breast implant inserted under your latissimus dorsi muscle, in your postop pack, there will be a card with details of your implants. Please keep this in a safe place.
- To activate your implant warranty, you will need to register your implants online within 30 days of your surgery. Instructions are also inside your postop pack.
- Your surgeon will register your implants with the Australian Breast Device Registry. This is a central national database independent of the surgeon and the implant manufacturers, with the main purpose of monitoring outcomes and safety of implants. To find out more about the registry, visit www.abdr.org.au

What to Expect after Breast Reconstruction Surgery:

- While your breast is swollen in the first few weeks, they may appear to be very swollen, firm and high on your chest wall. Allow at least 3 months (or longer if you are having tissue expansion) for the shape and size to settle.
- Your skin will be irritated and sensitive after surgery. You should avoid the sun, and use a gentle cleanser and moisturiser.
- 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 is usually numb (from the mastectomy). Sometimes sensation may grow into the area from surrounding skin - when the nerves recover (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.

- 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.
- 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 notice sudden swelling in 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.

Your Medications:

- Antibiotics: Please start your antibiotics as soon as possible after your procedure. Follow the instruction on the box as dispensed by the pharmacist. Please complete the course.
- If you have any vomiting or diarrhoea associated with either the antibiotics or pain-killers, please cease them immediately.
- Blood Thinners: If you have stopped your blood thinners before surgery, you can restart it the day after your procedure. Please take your usual dose at your usual times, unless otherwise instructed.
- Diabetic Medication: If you have stopped or adjusted your diabetic medications prior to surgery because you were fasting, you can restart it as soon as you have started eating and drinking normally again. Please take your usual dose at your usual times. Please do not restart it if you are vomiting.

Your Postoperative Appointment:

Your follow-up appointment will be with our practice nurse in the dressing clinic

Date _____ Time _____ at

- Sunnybank Australis Specialist Centre Clinic
- Everton Park Clinic

Contact Telephone Numbers:

During Office Hours and Non-Urgent Matters – 3353 6165

After hours and for Emergencies – please contact the hospital where you were discharged from.