

# *Postoperative Instructions: Breast Reduction*

## **Immediately After Surgery:**

- You will be in hospital overnight.
- You will have a drain coming from each breast which removes any old blood or extra fluid from the operative sites. These drains will be reviewed by your surgeon next morning prior to removal.
- Drains are usually removed after you have had your breakfast. You will be discharged two hours after drain-removal to make sure you do not bleed from your drain sites.
- Prior to discharge, you will need to have tolerated a meal, had minimal nausea, and emptied your bladder. Your discomfort should also be manageable by oral tablets alone without injections.
- You will be discharged from hospital with pain killers and a course of antibiotics.

## **Pain Medication:**

- Take 2x paracetamol tablets (Panamax or Panadol) every 6 hours regularly for the first 5-7 days.
- 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 you have asthma, or known allergic reactions to non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as Aspirin, Naproxen, Naprosyn or Feldene.
- Strong painkillers such as Tramadol, Palexia or Endone (oxycodone) will be prescribed for you. For severe pain, take these strong painkillers as instructed on the packet if required.

## **Hygiene:**

If you have been sent home with your dressings intact with foam tape:

- Do not have a full shower. Sponging and towelling around your dressings should be adequate. If you have a hand-held shower head, showering the lower half of your body is okay. **DO NOT** get your dressings wet.
- If you would like to wash your hair, do it with your head tipped back at the basin with help (going to the hairdresser is a very good option).
- If the corners of the tapes are starting to lift – trim it back so the corners sit flat on your skin.
- If your dressings are falling off, or becoming excessively itchy – contact the office for an earlier appointment with our nurses.
- Your first postoperative appointment will be 5-7 days, at which time your dressings will be removed. **BRING YOUR BRA** (in your postop pack) with you to this appointment, so that our nurses can fit you into the bra.

After your dressings have been removed:

- Shower daily over your transparent 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 soft bra at all times between showers (24/7).
- When your surgical bra is in the wash, you can wear a crop top or soft bra with no underwires.
- You are welcome to contact the rooms if you wish to purchase additional bras.

### **Wound and Scar Management:**

- Once your foam dressings have been removed, you will be able to shower over the tapes on your wounds. The tapes can be showered and pat dry. A hair dryer on the cold setting may be required to dry stubborn areas such as underneath the breast.
- If you have a clear surgical tape (Prineo) on your wounds, this will be removed at 3 weeks and you will be changed over to white fabric tape called Fixomull/Hypafix.
- If you have white fabric tape (Fixomull/Hypafix) on your wounds since surgery, our nurses will change the tape for you at 1 week.
- Once your wound is being taped with Fixomull/Hypafix, our nurses will show you how to tape your scars and change it weekly until you have reached week 6 after your surgery.
- If you notice any oozing or breakdown of your scars while changing your tape, apply a period pad inside your bra (to catch any fluid/blood oozing from the wound) and please contact the rooms. These could be signs associated with healing problems at the T-junction (midline under the breast). Although not detrimental to your final outcome, it will need to be managed appropriately to minimise scarring and decrease the risk of infection.
- You can start massaging along the scar (over the tape) at 4 weeks if your wounds are healed. Use your fingers or thumb, press firmly and massage in a rotating motion along the scar. It should only take approximately 5 minutes, using both hands on both breasts. Regular massage at least 5-6 times a day is recommended for 3 months.
- If you find that your scar is still quite lumpy and red at 8 weeks (when the taping has finished), it may be worth investing in a tube of silicone gel from your chemist. *Smear* a coat of gel on your scars twice a day. Continue with massage *over* the gel coating 5-6 times during the day. This is effective on modifying scars if used for at least 2 months and up to 6 months after surgery.
- Please do not hesitate to contact the rooms and make an appointment to see our experienced nurses if you have any concerns about your breasts or scars at any stage.

### **Sleeping:**

You can sleep in whichever position you are comfortable with; however, most patients are unable to lie on their sides for at least 2-3 weeks, whilst it can take up to 3 months before some can lie on their stomach. To ensure a good night sleep, make sure you 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 breast surgery, so take time to rest as needed and have appropriate support to make this possible.

### **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 to keep your body hydrated. This will pass once the anaesthetic has been eliminated from your system. If you have any persistent nausea and vomiting over 48 hours after surgery, please contact the rooms.

### **Activity:**

- You should rest quietly for the first 24 hours.
- Small, short walks around the ward or the house are encouraged to prevent clots in the legs.
- Avoid bending over, lifting (anything over 500g), pushing, pulling or stretching or reaching for at least 6 weeks (this includes house work, lifting children, groceries etc). No short/sharp or

repetitive movements. Heavy and repetitive activities with your arms above the head are NOT recommended for the first 6 weeks.

- You can move your arms, neck and torso in all directions – it won't tear anything out as long as the movements are within your comfortable range and done slowly and cautiously.
- 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
- It is strongly recommended that you stay at home and minimise outings in the first 4 weeks after surgery.
- Gentle walking around the house without too much arm movement is good exercise after the 3<sup>rd</sup> week. Try to keep it to a maximum of 20 minutes. Avoid getting hot and sweaty or you could cause a wound infection. Walking can be increased after the 4th week, build up your exercise slowly week by week. Make sure you wear a supportive bra (with no wires) during your exercises for the first 3 months.
- The post operative period can be an emotional time, feeling teary is normal and will pass.
- Most patients with desk jobs can return to work after 2-3 weeks, but those with more manual jobs (especially repetitive arm movements) need a minimum of 4-6 weeks off work.

### **Temperature:**

A low-grade fever up to 37.5 degrees Celsius for 1-2 days is normal. Call the office if:

- Your temperature is 38 degrees Celsius or over.
- You feel feverish, chills, or unwell

### **Swelling:**

Swelling reaches its peak at 3-5 days after surgery. Some patients have swelling and bruising that tracks all the way down into the upper abdomen and under the armpits. 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. The shape, size and appearance of your breast can take up to 3-6 months to settle.

### **Clothing & Bras:**

- You need to wear a supportive bra for 2 months. This does not necessarily have to be the bra we provided – as long as there is no wire and the bra is soft, supportive and non-irritating to the scars.
- DO NOT wear an underwire bra for at least 3 months (the wires will change the shape of your breast and also irritate the scar, thus encouraging prominent scar formation).
- Please contact us if you would like to purchase extra post-surgical bras.
- You may need to downsize your bra as the swelling settles.
- Delay bra and clothes shopping for at least 2-3 months – as your body shape and size will continue to change until the swelling in your breast has settled.

### **Follow-up:**

- Your first follow-up is with our nurses at 4-6 days after surgery for wound check and dressing change. 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.
- A second appointment is made with the nurses at 3 weeks after surgery for removal/change of the surgical tape on your wound. At this time, our nurses will also discuss with you how to look after your scars. They will demonstrate massaging of your breasts to soften the lumpiness in the breast and flatten out your scars.

- Additional dressing clinic appointments with our nurse will be made for you if your wounds are slow to heal.
- Your surgeon will see you around 10-12 weeks to check your progress and scars. Additional advice in regards to breast care, breast screening and scar management will be discussed with you during this consultation.
- Further appointments after this will be made if necessary.
- You are encouraged to contact rooms at any stage if you have any concerns prior to your next appointment.

### **What to Expect after a Breast Reduction:**

- While your breasts are swollen in the first few weeks, they may appear to be very big and high on your chest wall. Allow at least 3 months 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.
- Often your breast and nipples will be numb after surgery. Sensation may or may not return fully, but it will be a few months before any sensory recovery begins as the nerves take time to reconnect. When nerves recover, you may experience tingling, buzz, crawling or electric shock sensation periodically in the breast. This is expected, and will disappear after a few months.
- Your nurse will show you some gentle distraction techniques to help alleviate these sensations.
- The breast may feel firm and lumpy in places, especially if you have had some fat necrosis or small areas of bleeding within the breast tissue. Gentle massage over the breast tissue and these lumpy areas can begin 4 weeks after surgery. It takes time for the tissue to regain their normal suppleness and softness. Lumpy areas can take up to 6 months to soften; in some rare instances, they can take up to 2 years to disappear.
- 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.
- Some asymmetry of the breast and nipple is normal and should be expected from your surgery. Most people have minor asymmetry naturally prior to surgery. Breast Reduction surgery will correct major asymmetry between breasts and nipples, but it does not create perfect symmetry.
- 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 timely appointment for you if required.

### **Please Contact Us if:**

- You develop a fever or become unwell.
- Your nausea and vomiting persists after 48 hours.
- You develop spreading redness/rash over the operative area or suture lines.
- You feel fluid build up in your breasts or sudden swelling in the 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 you were discharged from