

# Implant Removal and/or Flat Closure

For breast reconstruction

*This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare, and how to plan for your recovery after implant removal and/or flat closure.*

## Aesthetic Flat Closure

*Aesthetic flat closure* is a surgery done by your breast surgeon or plastic surgeon, which creates a smooth chest contour. Extra skin, fat, and tissue are removed to create a flat appearance. This can be done at the time of a mastectomy related to breast cancer.

This surgery may or may not include a *free nipple graft*, which involves removing your natural nipple and attaching it into the appropriate location on your chest. Please discuss the option of a free nipple graft with your surgeon. We will provide additional information if this is a part of your surgical plan. We will provide separate instructions for this procedure.

## Implant Removal

Some patients who have had breast reconstruction before want to have their implants removed without replacing them. This could be because of painful *capsular contracture* (scar tissue) or personal preference. Removing an implant might involve *capsulectomy* (removal of scar tissue) or *capsulotomy* (partial removal or release of scar tissue).

## Incision Care and Healing

- You will likely wake up in a surgical bra or compression wrap. If so, wear this garment for 4 weeks after your surgery. Remove it for showering and laundering.
  - You may buy a front-clasp sports bra (non-underwire) or a compression vest to wear instead if you like. This needs to be snug and supportive.
- Remove the outermost (top) dressing from your surgical site 48 hours after surgery. Do this before you shower for the first time.
- If your incision has thin strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave them in place until they fall off. If the Steri-Strips are still in place when you come to the clinic for your first follow-up visit, your provider will remove them.
- You may feel numbness around your surgical site. Your surgical sites may be bruised and swollen.



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of this handout.

## Hygiene

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and wash very gently over your incisions.
- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

## Drains

You will have drains placed at the time of surgery. We will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout "Closed Bulb Drain Care: For a Jackson-Pratt (JP) or Blake drain" to learn more.

## Activities and Return to Work

- For 4 weeks, move your arms gently:
  - Do **not** reach your arm above shoulder height on the side of the surgery.
  - Do **not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.
  - Avoid repetitive arm movements such as chores (for example, vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry).
- Avoid *aerobic exercise* (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Walking is encouraged and is helpful for healing and rebuilding strength. Gradually increase your distance and length of time as you heal.
- Return to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please talk with your surgeon about what may be best for you.

## Sleep Position

- Sleep on your back for 4 weeks after surgery, with your head slightly raised. After that, you may sleep on your side.
- It may be helpful to stack pillows, use a wedge pillow, or sleep in a recliner to keep your head raised.

## Pain Control

- Please read the handout "Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery."
- Do **not** use ice or heat directly on your surgical sites.

## When to Contact the Care Team:

### Call the clinic nurse if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
  - Redness
  - Increased swelling
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Pus or cloudy-colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer helped by your pain medicine

**If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911.**

**Redness, swelling, pain, cramps, or warmth - usually in one limb - may be signs of a blood clot. Please go to the ER (emergency room) immediately if you experience any of these.**

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

**During Clinic Hours  
(Monday through Friday, except holidays, 8am to 5pm):**

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through MyChart. Please include a photo if needed.

You may also call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, option 2.

**Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours:**

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.