

BREAST SURGERY – POST OPERATIVE INFORMATION

How do I control pain after surgery?

It is normal to have some pain after surgery, which will be lessened by the pain medication that your surgeon prescribes.

Do not drive while taking prescribed medications (narcotics). Examples are Tylenol #2 or #3 with codeine, Tramacet or Oxycodone (also known as Percocet, Oxycocet or Endocet).

As pain decreases, take either regular acetaminophen or Ibuprofen (Tylenol or Advil), rather than narcotics.

Will the narcotics have side effects?

While taking the narcotics you may become constipated. This is when you have less bowel movements than normal or your stool is hard or difficult to pass. Your doctor may recommend that you use a stool softener. You should also drink 6-8 glasses of fluid per day and aim for at least 20 grams of fibre in your diet to help prevent constipation. Examples of fibre include whole grain breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, beans, dried fruits, seeds and nuts.

Do I have to make any changes to my eating habits?

You may return to your normal diet as you feel up to eating or drinking. Do not drink alcohol while taking narcotics.

How should I take care of my stitches and dressings?

Keep the bulky or large white dressing on for the first 48 hours. You may feel more comfortable wearing a soft supportive bra after the bulky dressing has been removed. The white strips of tape (steri-strips) should be left on the incision for 7-10 days, based on your surgeon's instructions. You may carefully remove these at that time. If the strips fall off on their own prior to this, they do not need to be replaced.

Stitches do not have to be removed as they will dissolve on their own. They will be clear and you may not see them.

If you have staples you will be given an appointment to have them removed in the Ambulatory Care Nurse Clinic at Credit Valley Hospital or a nurse in a community care centre will have instructions to remove them.

When can I start showering and bathing?

Keep your incision dry for 48 hours after the surgery. Once you have removed the bulky dressing you can take a shower (no soaking of the incision in water for 3 weeks, eg., no pools, hot tubs, lakes, oceans). If you have a drain inserted, do not soak or immerse the drain in water. The white steri-strips can get wet, but do not soak them. If bathing, only bathe your body below the incision. If showering with a drain in place, cover the area where the drain goes into the skin with plastic. For example, you can use plastic wrap and tape. Do not apply soap to the incision for 1 week. Pat the incision dry, do not rub it. Do not apply cream or lotions to the incision for 2 weeks. If you have an armpit incision, avoid the use of deodorant or hair removal for 6 weeks.

You may notice when you take the bulky dressing off that the skin is pink. This is normal. It is from the product used to clean your skin before the surgery. The pink should wear off in a few washes.

<https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/publications/exercises-after-breast-surgery>

Will my physical activities be affected?

You may restart your normal everyday activities, but avoid vigorous activities until you have been seen in follow-up. It is important to move and use your arm. You can start heavier activities (such as vacuuming and laundry) after 1 month. Avoid heavy lifting for the first 4 weeks after surgery (do not lift more than 10 pounds). You may have sexual activity once you are comfortable.

If you have had lymph nodes removed from the armpit or have had a mastectomy, begin the exercises from the book “Exercises After Breast Surgery” by the Canadian Cancer Society. If you need a copy of this book, please ask your health care team or visit:

Start these exercises as soon as possible as failure to do so can result in a possible permanent loss of arm movement. You may start the exercises if you have a drain in place. The stitches will not pull out and you will not injure anything.

After doing the exercises you should have normal movement of your arm and shoulder by 4 to 6 weeks after your surgery.

What can I do if I have a concern?

You will likely have “lumpiness”, numbness, burning or itchiness around or under the incision. You will also likely experience swelling and fluid buildup under the breast or armpit. This fluid buildup can cause a sloshing sound when you move around. This is a normal part of the healing process and will go away within 1 to 2 months.

Please call your surgeon’s office during regular office hours if you have any of the following:

- heavy bleeding with increasing swelling around the incision
- enlarging swelling at the armpit incision
- the dressing around the wound is soaking wet
- uncontrolled pain even if you are taking your pain medication as prescribed
- redness, warm, swelling near your incision and a temperature over 38C (100.4F)

The Carlo Fidani Regional Cancer Centre
www.thp.ca/patientservices/cancerservices

Important Note – this resource was created by the Carlo Fidani Regional Cancer Centre for patients, families and caregivers’ general information about managing post-op Breast Oncology Surgery. The information and resources do not replace medical advice. Every effort has been made to ensure information in this resource is correct, complete and up-to-date, but no guarantee is made to that effect. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this resource, please speak to a member of your health care team.