



The Breast Lump – Cancer (malignancy, carcinoma)

Mastectomy: What to Expect at Home

Your Recovery

Removal of the breast(s) is sometimes the most suitable way to begin treating breast cancer. It is sometimes used to reduce the chance of having cancer in people who have a very high likelihood of having breast cancer. This surgical option is considered based on factors such as age, extent (amount) of cancer in the breast or breasts, genetic mutations that predispose someone to having breast cancer, and other factors.

Having the breast(s) removed can be challenging psychologically. Changing your body shape and appearance takes time to accept and feel ok with. This is normal. Counseling can be helpful with this process, as it is likely a completely new experience for you. Please ask us about this.

During surgery, your doctor may remove some lymph nodes in your armpit (axilla), referred to as sentinel lymph nodes, to see if the cancer has spread. If so, you may feel either numbness or tingling ("pins and needles") in your armpit or on the inside of your upper arm. This should improve over the next several weeks. Some people have numbness for a longer time.

Healing from this surgery is quite a process and requires the use of surgical drains, compression wraps, and plenty of time. Often physical therapy is useful to learn about and prevent lymphedema, retain or restore shoulder range of motion, and for scar management. While we always consider this, feel free to ask about it.

Discovering that you have cancer and need treatments can cause you to feel many strong emotions and you may need some help coping. Again, this is a new experience and new experiences often require new skills. Please, seek out family, friends, and, perhaps especially, counselors/therapists for support. There are things that you can do at home to make yourself feel better while you go through the process of diagnosis, consulting with specialists, and treatment, such as guided meditation or yoga. These can be remarkably helpful to your mind and body as you process the feelings that naturally follow the diagnosis of cancer. Please ask your healthcare provider for ideas or references or visit websites such as www.cancer.org for more information.



General information:

You should wear the provided compression garment/chest binder/bra, day and night, for 2 weeks. You will probably be able to go back to work or your normal routine 3 to 4 weeks after the surgery, possibly sooner based on how you feel, and what your physical duties are. However, this may depend on whether you have more treatments to undergo.

Instructions to care for your wound at home:

1. Keep incisions clean and dry. 1 day after surgery you may shower with soap and water, then pat the incisions dry, and put the binder and compression wrap back on. Wear the compression wrap and binder for 3 days after surgery. After this, you can stop wearing one of them, but should continue to wear either the binder or the compression wrap to minimize fluid collection under the skin. Wear one of them for 2 weeks, day and night. It's annoying, but particularly useful.
2. Leave the skin glue in place for at least 10 days – don't pick at it or pull it off early. You may opt to leave it alone until it begins to flake off. This is fine and may take more than a month to fully come off.
3. No lifting, pushing, or pulling more than 15lbs for 2 weeks.
4. Most people find that mastectomy is not as painful as imagined. They typically use one or two prescription pain medication pills, and then opt for ice packs and/or Tylenol/ibuprofen. For this reason, we are careful not to prescribe pain medicine that is unnecessarily strong and puts you at risk for side-effects, when it is not needed. Please consider that while we don't know your body like you do, we do know our profession very well and this is our best plan for getting you safely through surgery using as little medication as needed to allow you to rest. Please trust our judgement.
 - a. For pain control, start by using an ice pack placed over the sore spot for 15 minutes, as many times a day as you need. Keep a layer of cloth between your skin and the pack to protect you from injuring your skin. Replace the compression wrap after icing.
 - b. In addition to the ice pack, you may choose to alternate taking Tylenol and Motrin (ibuprofen) every 3 hours. For example, take Tylenol at 9am, then Motrin at 12pm, then Tylenol at 3pm, etc. If stronger pain medication is needed despite the above measures, you may also choose to take an Ultram/Tramadol but use it only



POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

when the other measures are not enough to allow you to relax and rest. Any, all, or none of these may be used for pain relief. If the pain is tolerable, or if you prefer, you may of course opt not to use any of these measures.

- c. You may apply an ice pack over the incision, or painful area for up to 10 to 15 minutes at a time, every other hour and as needed for soreness or pain.
5. Please call us at **208-392-3354** to speak with a member of our team about any questions or concerns you may have.
6. Drain care: Record drain output, then empty drains and strip drain tubing every 12 hours. Please call our office about your drain, after it has been in place for 1 week, and when the output is less than 30 ml (about 1.01 oz) total in 24 hours, two days in a row.