After DIEP Flap Breast Reconstruction

Self-care at home

This handout gives self-care instructions to follow at home after having DIEP flap breast reconstruction.

Activity

For 4 weeks after your surgery:

• Do not lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. (A gallon of milk weighs a little more than 8 pounds).

• Move your arms very gently:
  - Do not raise your arms above waist level to the side, or above shoulder level to the front.
  - Do not reach behind your back.
  - Do not push or pull on anything.

• Do not do any exercise that makes you breathe hard or makes your heart beat faster. It is OK to go walking.

• Do not drive until 4 weeks after surgery and you have stopped taking prescription pain medicine.

• Do not wear clothes that put pressure on your breasts. It is OK to wear tighter clothing below your chest, such as bicycle shorts or yoga pants.

• Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming. It is OK to shower without covering your drain sites or incisions.

• When you sleep, lie on your back, with your legs and head slightly raised. Do this until you come to the clinic for your first follow-up visit.

Dressings and Drains

• Read the handout “Caring for Your Closed Bulb Drain” to learn how to take care of your drain.

• If output from one of your drains is less than 30 cc in 24 hours for 2 days in a row, call 206.598.1217 to schedule a clinic visit to have the drain removed.

Call your nurse or doctor if you have any of the symptoms on page 3 of this handout.
Doppler Wires

The Doppler wires will stay in place until your doctor takes them out. The wires are held in place with white tape called Steri-Strips.

If the wires become loose, use more Steri-Strips or surgical tape to keep them in place. You can buy Steri-Strips at most drugstores.

Pain Medicines

- You may take one of these non-prescription non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) as needed for pain:
  - 600 mg ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and others) every 6 hours
  - 500 mg naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, and others) 2 times a day

*IMPORTANT: Do not take NSAIDs if you have had gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding or gastric bypass surgery, or if your doctor has told you not to take these drugs.

- You may also take 650 mg acetaminophen (Tylenol and others) every 6 hours.

- For strong pain, take your prescription pain medicine as needed. These medicines are called opioids, and may have names such as Oxycodone, dilaudid, or Vicodin. As your pain gets better, try to use less of this medicine each day and use non-prescription pain medicine instead. This is called tapering.

  To taper your prescription pain medicine, you can:
  - Take a smaller dose each time you take it,
  - Take it less often,

  Call the clinic nurse if you have any problems tapering your dose of opioids.

- Opioids can cause constipation. If needed, take a stool softener (such as docusate) and a laxative while you are taking this medicine. See the handout “Treating Constipation.”

Follow-up Visit

You have been scheduled for a follow-up visit with your surgeon or the surgeon’s physician assistant (PA).

- Please bring your drain output record to this visit.
- If you need to change this appointment, call the plastic surgery scheduler at 206.598.1217 as soon as you can.
When to Call

Call Right Away
If you have a major change in the color of your “flap” skin or new swelling in your breast:

- **Call 206.598.6190 right away** and ask for the resident on call for Plastic Surgery to be paged.

- **Do not eat or drink anything** until you talk with the Plastic Surgery resident on call and find out what to do. It is OK to take sips of water to take your medicines.

Other Care Needs
Call the clinic nurse if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and chills
- Any sign of infection at your incision:
  - Redness
  - Increased pain
  - Bad-smelling drainage
  - Increased drainage
- Nausea, vomiting, or both
- Shortness of breath or ongoing leg pain (see handout, “Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis After Surgery”)

- Concerns or questions that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Please see phone number to call in the “Questions” box on this page.

Questions?
Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217, and press 8.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the resident on call for your surgeon to be paged.