Mastectomy

What to expect, how to prepare, and planning for recovery after breast surgery

What is a mastectomy?

A mastectomy is surgery to remove one or both breasts. This surgery is often done to treat or prevent breast cancer.

During the surgery, your doctor may also test your lymph system using a procedure called sentinel node mapping. This test traces the flow of lymph fluid from the tumor to a sentinel node, the first node the fluid reaches after leaving the tumor.

How do I prepare?

Your Preoperative Visit

At your preoperative visit, your doctor will talk with you about any other tests that may be done at the time of your surgery.

You will also be given a packet of items you will use at home after surgery. This packet will include:

- Aquaguards (disposable dressings to protect your drain site from getting wet while you shower)
- Paper tape
- Drain dressings (4-inch squares)
- Drain output record
- Measuring cup
- Alcohol wipes

Your doctor may also give you a prescription for a post-surgical camisole at your preoperative visit. After surgery, you may wear this camisole, or a surgical bra if you received one, for as long as you like.
1 Week Before Your Surgery

- **Stop taking aspirin and some other medicines:** Do not take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your operation unless specifically told to continue. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). See the attached handout, “Medicines to Avoid Before Surgery,” for more information.

- **Arrange for someone to drive you home:** You will be sent home from the hospital 24 to 48 hours after your surgery. You will need someone to drive you home from the hospital.

48 hours Before Your Surgery

- **Shaving:** Do not shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do not shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.

24 Hours Before Your Surgery

- **Take 2 showers:** Take 1 shower the night before and a second shower the morning of your operation. Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.

  Do not use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair. Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.

- **Arrival time:** The pre-surgery nurse will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your operation. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not hear from the pre-surgery nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206-598-6334.

  The pre-surgery nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and will remind you:
  - Not to eat or drink after a certain time
  - Which of your regular medicines to take or not take
  - To sip only enough water to swallow your pills
  - To bring a list of the medicines you take
  - That you will need someone to drive you home

Day of Surgery

- **Heating blanket:** To reduce your risk of infection, you will be covered with a heating blanket to warm your body while you wait to go into the operating room. Ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.
In the Hospital After Surgery

**Dressings**
- You will have white tapes called Steri-Strips and other external dressings (bandages) over your surgery site.
- You will also have a split dressing around your drain site. This dressing will be held in place with paper tape.

**Drain**
You will have a plastic tube called a *drain* next to your incision. This drain will help remove the extra fluid that normally builds up after surgery.

Before you go home, your nurse will show you how to:
- Measure the drainage and record the amount.
- Change the drain dressing.
- “Strip” the tubing so that it does not clog. This is also called “milking” the tubing.

**Deep Breathing and Coughing Exercise**
Since you received general anesthesia for your surgery, your nurse will teach you a deep breathing and coughing exercise before you leave the hospital. This exercise will help prevent pneumonia.

Do these exercises every 1 to 2 hours while you are awake:
- Take 10 deep breaths.
- Follow with several coughs.

**When You Go Home**
Most people go home 24 to 48 hours after their surgery.

**Precautions**
Medicine given during and after your operation will affect you. For 24 hours after your operation, do **not**:
- Drive
- Drink alcohol
- Use any machinery
- Travel alone
- Sign any legal papers
- Be responsible for the care of another person
**Dressing Care**

- Change the dressing around your drain once a day, or more often if it gets damp or soiled.
- Remove all outer dressings, except for the Steri-Strips, 48 hours after your surgery.

**Drain Care**

- Your drain should be stripped and emptied 2 times a day, or more often if needed. To strip the drain:
  - With one hand, firmly hold the drain tube where it enters your skin.
  - With your other hand, place an alcohol wipe around the end of the tube next to your skin. “Milk” the drain, starting near your skin and squeezing as you slowly move the wipe to the other end of the tube.
- Collect the drain fluid in your measuring cup. Record the amount of fluid you collect on your drain records. Your drain will be removed when the output is less than 30 ml over 24 hours for 2 days in a row.

**Pain Management**

Use extra-strength acetaminophen (Extra Strength Tylenol) or the pain medicine your doctor prescribed for you. The medicine is provided to help keep you comfortable. Use it as needed so that you can resume your usual activities.

**Showering**

- After 48 hours, when you have removed your dressings (except for the Steri-Strips), you may shower with one of the Aquaguards covering your drain site. It is OK for the Steri-Strips to get wet in the shower, but **not** the drain site.

**Activity**

- Keep doing your deep-breathing and coughing exercises at home for 1 to 2 more weeks.
- You may use your arm as much as you like. Let pain be your guide. Resume your daily activities such as showering, combing your hair, and brushing your teeth. Stop doing any activity that causes you discomfort.
- Try to take a walk every day, and slowly increase your distance.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

For patients of Dr. Byrd and Dr. Mann:
UWMC Surgical Specialties
Nurse Advice Line:
206-598-4549 (weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

For patients of Dr. Anderson, Dr. Calhoun, and Dr. Javid:
SCCA Women’s Center:
206-288-7563 (weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the resident on call for Surgery to be paged.

Or, ask for your surgeon to be paged:
Dr. __________________

Diet

You may resume eating your regular diet after surgery. If you are constipated, increase the fluid and fiber in your diet. Try the tips in the handout, “Constipation After Your Surgery.”

Medicines

After surgery, you may resume your usual medicines as prescribed.

Returning to Work

The amount of time you will need to take off work will vary from 1 week to several weeks, depending on the type of surgery you have. Your doctor will suggest a recovery plan that fits your needs.

Call the Nurse Advice Line or Your Doctor 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 in your incision:
  - Redness
  - Increasing pain
  - Swelling
  - Foul-smelling drainage
  - A change in the type or an increase in the amount of drainage
- Increased fullness of your skin around the drain site
- The drain becomes clogged or will not hold suction
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Follow-up

- A pathologist will examine a sample of your breast tissue that was removed during surgery. Your doctor will talk with you about the results at your follow-up visit.
- Bring your drain records to your follow-up visit.