Questions?

Contact Surgical Specialties Nurse Advice Line:
206-598-4549

Weekdays
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

After hours call Paging:
206-598-6190
and ask them to page the Plastic Surgery Resident on call, or
Dr. __________, your attending surgeon.

Call the Nurse Advice Line or Your Doctor If:

- You have bleeding that soaks your dressing.
- Your temperature is greater than 100°F or 38°C, or you have chills.
- You have any sign of infection: redness, increased pain, swelling, foul smelling drainage, or increase in the amount of drainage from your wound.
- You are sick to your stomach and throwing up.
- You have concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up appointment.

TRAM Flap Breast Reconstruction

What to expect and how to prepare for your operation

**TRAM = Transverse rectus abdominus myocutaneous**

This is the most common type of breast reconstruction using your own tissue.

**Pedicle Flap:** Skin and fat from the lower abdomen (from the belly button down to just above the hairline) are transferred on one of the *rectus* muscles to create a new breast. The muscle carries the blood supply to the skin and fat used to create the new breast.

**Free Flap:** The same skin and fat as listed above is removed from the lower abdomen. It is temporarily taken off the body. The flap blood vessels are sewn into blood vessels in the chest wall to keep the flap of skin and fat alive, and the new breast is created with it. The free flap method is chosen when every bit of tissue is needed to create a breast that matches the other side.

This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare for your operation, and how to plan for your recovery.
How to Prepare for a TRAM Flap

**Things to Remember**

- You will stay in the hospital for 5 to 7 days after your operation. When you go home, you will need help with food preparation and general support for 2 weeks.

**24 Hours Before Your Operation**

**Things to Do**

- **Eating Before Your Operation** - The day before your operation you should eat light foods that are easily digested.

- **Fleet Enemas** - You need to purchase a Fleet enema at your local pharmacy. The night before your operation you should use it. This will help empty your bowels and make your recovery a little easier.

**Questions and Notes**

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Precautions and Self-care to Speed Your Recovery

Shower
You may shower the day after your drains are removed. No tub bathing for 2 weeks after your operation.

First Follow-up Visit
You will have your stitches removed and the white surgical tapes that cover your incisions changed. You will be reminded to start standing up straight at this time. We will want to know how your pain is and how you are doing at home.

Activity Limits
You cannot lift anything heavier than a phone book for 8 weeks from the time of your operation. Activities like gardening, vacuuming, and aerobic activities should be avoided during your 8-week recovery. You can walk for exercise.

Return to Work
How much work you take off depends on what you do for a living. Most people take 1 to 2 months off to recover.

• Shower: Using the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you, you shower and soap your body. Do not use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions attached to the soap bottle.) 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 Monday, the nurse will call you on Friday. If you do not hear from the nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206-598-6334.

The pre-surgery nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and remind you to:
– Not eat or drink after a certain time.
– Take or not take your regular medications.
– Take high blood pressure, thyroid and seizure medications the day of surgery. Use only enough water to swallow your pills.
What to Expect After a TRAM Flap

Waking Up After Your Operation
You will wake up in the recovery room. You will feel sleepy. You will have:
- An IV in your arm which will be used to give you medicine for pain and nausea.
- A catheter tube inserted into your bladder to drain your urine.
- Sequential compression devices (SCDs) which are inflatable stockings for your legs.
- Several drain tubes in your incisions.

Recovering in Your Hospital Room
The First 24 Hours
You will be admitted to a specialized unit where the nurses are familiar with your recovery needs.

If you are having a free flap reconstruction, you will spend the first 24 to 48 hours in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The nurses will check the blood flow to the flap often in the first 24 hours.

Incision
Your chest incision will depend on the type of mastectomy performed by your breast surgeon. Your abdominal incision will be above your hairline and will extend from hip to hip. All of your incisions will be covered with gauze right after your operation.

Pain Management
You will have a pain medicine pump for 3 days after your operation, which you control. This will allow you to get medicine intravenously when you need it so that you are comfortable. When you go home, use the extra-strength Tylenol or the pain medicine your doctor prescribed for you.

Bed Rest
You will be on bed rest for the first day after your operation. The bed will be flexed into a lounge chair position to reduce the strain on your abdomen. Your nurse will help you to do breathing and coughing exercises every 1 to 2 hours while you are awake to prevent pneumonia. You will have special devices (sequential compression devices or SCDs) on your legs that fill with air and squeeze your legs to help keep the blood moving while you are on bed rest and to prevent clots from forming.

Bladder Catheter
You will have a catheter in your bladder for about 3 days. This will allow you to rest and lessen the strain on your abdomen.

Drains
You will have small drains in your abdomen and breast reconstruction. They usually are removed before you go home.