

# Activities of Daily Living After TUG Surgery



*This handout gives guidelines to follow after TUG breast reconstruction surgery. Follow these guidelines to protect your flap and incisions and to help your recovery.*

## Types of TUG Surgery

TUG (*transverse upper gracilis*) surgery is either *unilateral* (1 breast) or *bilateral* (both breasts). If you are not sure which surgery you had, please ask your care team. **You will need to follow the instructions for:**

- Unilateral (1 breast)
- Bilateral (both breasts)

## Protect Your TUG Flap

Follow these instructions for 4 weeks after surgery, or until your care team tells you otherwise. If you had **unilateral** surgery, follow these directions for the arm on your surgical side. If you had **bilateral** surgery, follow these directions for both arms.

- Do **not** lift, push, pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (a gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds)
- Do **not** reach higher than shoulder height (90 degrees) in front of you and out to the side.
- Do **not** do any *aerobic exercise* which raises your heart rate.
- Do **not** wear clothes that put pressure on your breasts
- Avoid straining, holding your breath, and bearing down

## Move Your Legs Gently

- Avoid bringing your surgical leg(s) close to your chest. Do not lift your surgical leg(s) higher than your hip or sit with your surgical leg(s) in a figure-4.
- Avoid any leg movements that cause strain on your flap site

## Standing Up from a Bed, Chair, and Toilet

- It is harder to stand up from low, deep, or soft surfaces such as a soft recliner or couch. Try to sit on firmer, taller surfaces that are comfortable for you to stand up from.
- Do not use your surgical side arm(s) to push up from armrests to stand. Lean forward and use your momentum to stand. If you need help to stand up, your caregiver should assist from your hips, **NOT** your arms.
- Your *occupational therapist* (OT) may suggest you use a raised toilet seat at home if your toilet is too low.



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# Getting Dressed

## Button-down shirts and jackets:

- **If your surgery was unilateral:** Put your surgical-side arm in first. Then use your non-surgical arm to bring the shirt around your back and put your other arm in.
- **If your surgery was bilateral:** Put one arm into your sleeve. Ask your caregiver to bring your shirt around your back and help put your other arm in.
- Another option is to button the 3 lowest buttons of your shirt. Then put it on overhead like you would put on a T-shirt (see instructions below).

## Pullover T-shirts and tank tops:

- **If your surgery is unilateral:** Thread your arms through the shirt sleeves in front of you, dressing the surgical side first. Then use your non-surgical arm to pull the shirt over your head and down in the back. Do not reach behind your back with the surgical arm to pull down your shirt.
- **If your surgery is bilateral:** Put your arms through the shirt sleeves in front of you. Then bunch up the back of the shirt and push it over your head. Be careful to avoid lifting your elbows higher than 90 degrees (shoulder level). Do NOT reach behind your back to pull down your shirt. See the photos below for an example.



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## Pants and underwear:

- You may pull your underwear and pants up over your drain insertion sites. Check to make sure the lines are not kinked or bent.
- Pull up pants and underwear **only** in the front and the sides. Do **not** reach behind your back. You may need help to pull your pants up in the back, especially if they are tight.

### **Socks and shoes:**

- To avoid falling, sit down to put on your socks and shoes.
- To avoid bending at your abdomen or waist, bring your foot up to you. This movement may be more comfortable while you are healing.

## **Bathroom Tips**

### **Using the toilet:**

- Your OT may advise you to use a toilet aid device, a bidet, or peri bottle to make it easier to reach and clean yourself.
- Do not strain, hold your breath, or bear down with bowel movements.

### **Showers:**

- You can shower following your TUG surgery after you have followed up with your surgeon and your wound vac has been removed. Have someone help you the first few times you shower, until you feel sure about your safety.
- When your doctor tells you it's safe to take a shower, follow these guidelines:
  - Attach your drains to a lanyard or necklace and wear it around your neck. This will help prevent your drains being tugged or falling.
  - It is okay for soap and water to run over your incisions and drains. Avoid scrubbing these areas and gently pat them dry. Do not submerge your incisions until fully healed (do not take a bath or sit in a hot tub).
  - You can wash your hair and face by tucking your head down and lifting your arms in front of you to reach your head. Be careful that you do not lift your elbows higher than your shoulders.
  - When washing your underarms, only lift your arms up to shoulder height.
  - When washing your bottom avoid reaching behind back, you may reach between your legs in the front.
  - Your OT may advise using a shower chair or tub transfer bench if you feel unsteady on your feet or get dizzy.

### **Questions?**

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