



After DIEP Flap Breast Reconstruction

Self-care at home

This handout gives self-care instructions to follow at home after having DIEP (deep inferior epigastric perforate) flap breast reconstruction.

Activity

For **4 weeks** after your surgery:

- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.
- Move your arms very gently:
 - Do **not** raise your arm or arms above shoulder level to the front or the side.
 - Do **not** reach behind you.
 - Do **not** push or pull anything.
 - Avoid repetitive arm movements such as chores (vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry).
- We encourage walking because it is helpful for healing and rebuilding strength. Start with 3 to 4 walks a day for 5 to 10 minutes each. Gradually increase your distance and length of time as you heal.
- Avoid *aerobic exercise* (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Do **not** drive until:
 - It is more than 4 weeks after surgery.
 - You have stopped taking prescription pain medicine.
- Do **not** wear clothes that put pressure on your breasts. However, we recommend wearing tight clothes around your abdomen, such as bicycle shorts or yoga pants. This will help lower the amount of fluid your body retains.
- When you sleep, lie on your back with your legs and back slightly raised.

Hygiene

- We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection. Use mild soap and wash very gently over your incisions.
- Do **not** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

Drains

You will have 3 to 4 drains placed during surgery. Please read the handout, “Caring for Your JP Drains.”

Doppler Wires

The Doppler wires are held in place with white tape called Steri-Strips. The wires will stay in place until your provider takes them out. This is usually done at your 2-week follow-up visit.

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

Pain Control

Please **do not** use ice or heat on your surgical sites. Read the handout, “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery,” for more information about pain control.

When to Contact the Care Team

Call Right Away If:

- You experience changes to your flap (the visible part of your abdominal tissue that was surgically moved to your breast).
- Your flap skin turns dark red, purple, or black.
- Your flap skin turns pale and cold.
- You experience rapid swelling to the reconstructed breast.

Call 206.598.6190 right away and ask to page the resident on call for Plastic Surgery. **Do not eat or drink anything** until you speak with a provider.

Other Care Needs

Call the clinic nurse if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Shaking and/or chills
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
 - Redness
 - Increased swelling
 - Bad-smelling drainage
 - Pus or cloudy colored drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer eased by your pain medicine

Questions?

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

During Clinic Hours (Monday through Friday except holidays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.):

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if it would help explain your concern.

Or, you may call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217 option 2.

Urgent Needs Outside of Clinic Hours:

If you have an urgent care need after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.

If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, please call 911.

If you are experiencing redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb, this may be signs of a blood clot. Please go to your local ER.