

# Caring for Your JP Drains

For patients at the Breast Surgery Clinic

UW Medicine

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
MEDICAL CENTER

When you go home, you will have JP (Jackson-Pratt) drains in place. This handout explains how to care for your drains at home until they are ready to be removed.



Scan with your phone camera for a digital copy of this handout.

## Why do I have drains?

JP drains are closed bulb drains that move fluid away from your surgical area. This helps keep blood and fluids from building up under your skin and causing swelling. It also helps your wound heal.

The tubing goes through your skin near your surgical incision. It is held in place by a stitch called a *suture*.

It is normal for *drainage* (fluid) color to change. It may be brown, dark red, red, orange, pink, yellow, and clear. There may also be pieces of tissue in your drainage.

To avoid infection, do not:

- Disconnect the bulb from the drain tubing.
- Poke holes or cut the tubing or bulb.
- Flush or irrigate the tubing or bulb.

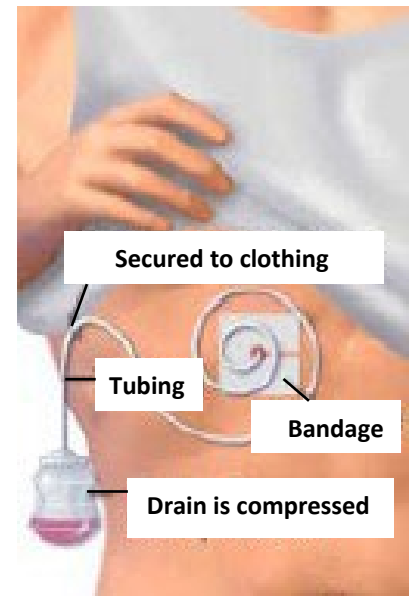
## Recording Your Drainage

- You will receive a measuring cup when you leave the hospital. Use this to measure your drainage.
- Label your drains with numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 and keep track of the drainage from each one.

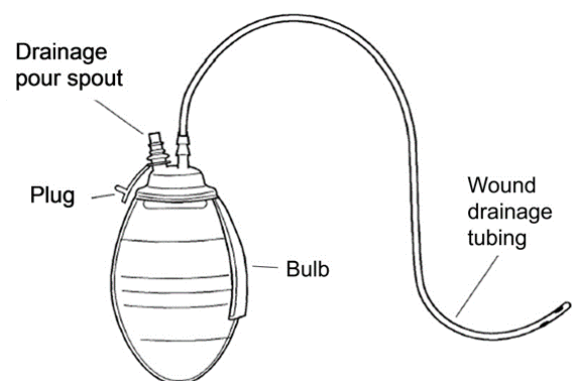
## How to Empty and Record Your Drainage

Empty each drain at least 2 times every day, or whenever it is 1/3 full. To empty a drain:

- Have your measuring cup nearby.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Loosen the safety pins or clips that hold the tubing to your clothes.
- Clean the outside of the drain plug and spout with an alcohol wipe.

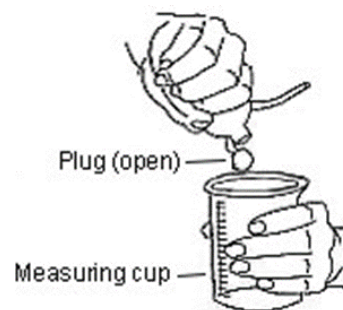


A Jackson-Pratt drain



The parts of a JP drain

- Open the drain plug.
- Turn the bulb upside down over the measuring cup. Gently squeeze the bulb to empty it into the cup (see the middle picture on the right).
- Clean the plug and spout again with an alcohol wipe.
- Squeeze the bulb flat with your hand (see the top picture on the right). Keep it squeezed as you put the plug back into the spout.
- Never squeeze the bulb after you have put the cap back in place. Doing this can push the drainage back into your wound.
- Look on the side of the measuring cup to see how much drainage you emptied. Write this amount, in milliliters (mL), on your drainage record sheets at the end of this handout.
- Check the drainage color and smell.
- Empty the drainage into your toilet and flush.
- Pin or clip the drain bulb back onto your clothing.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water.



***Turn the drain collection container upside down over the measuring cup. Gently squeeze the bulb to empty it.***



***Squeeze the bulb flat with your hand before you replace the plug.***

## Bathing

- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming while you have drains.
- Starting 48 hours after surgery, shower every day (unless instructed otherwise). Let soapy water run over the drain sites. Do not scrub.
- Attach your drains to a lanyard or shoelace looped loosely around your neck while you shower. This will ensure the tubes do not fall out.

## How to Strip Your Drains

Stripping your drains 2 or more times each day will prevent them from clogging.

### To strip your drains:

- With one hand, hold the tubing firmly. This will make sure the tubing does not get pulled.
- With your other hand, use an alcohol wipe between your fingers to pinch the tube flat.
- Continue pinching as you slide the wipe down the tube toward the bulb. The tube should be squeezed flat as you slide the wipe down the tube.
- Once you reach the bulb, let go.

## When Your Drains Are Ready to Be Removed

The timing for removing your drains depends on the type of surgery you had.

- All drains must remain in for at least 1 week.
- Check with your nurse for which of the following applies to you:
  - For most surgeries, drains can be removed when you empty less than 30 mL of drainage in 24 hours, for 2 days in a row.
  - For surgeries involving an implant or expander, drains can be removed when you empty less than 20 mL of drainage in 24 hours, for 2 days in a row.
  - For surgeries with 2 drains placed under the same incision or close together, we will remove 1 when it meets criteria. For safety, we will wait 2 more days before removing the other drain.

When your drains are ready to be removed, you have 3 options:

- Send a MyChart message or call the clinic at 206.668.6746 and press 2. Tell the nurse that your drains are ready to be removed and ask to schedule a nurse visit.
- Contact your primary care provider and ask if they are willing to remove the drains.
- If you feel OK removing the drains yourself, contact the clinic for instructions.

Bring your drain records to all your follow-up visits.

## When to Contact the Clinic

Contact the clinic if:

- You have redness, swelling, or drainage at your incision or drain site
- You have a fever higher than 100.5°F (38.5°C)
- Your bulb or collection container refills with blood or drainage right after you empty it
- You have more pain than usual, or your pain is not eased by your pain medicines
- Your drain bulb will not stay compressed
- Your drainage is cloudy or has a bad smell
- The tube falls out
- A suture comes out

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

### 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, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm):** 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 Breast Surgery Clinic at 206.668.6746.



