

## Implant-Based Reconstruction

### *For breast reconstruction*

*This handout tells you what to expect after having breast implant surgery. Breast implants can be used for reconstruction. This may be post-mastectomy, for congenital chest deformity, or for gender affirming care.*

### About Your Surgery

#### *Post-mastectomy or Congenital breast deformity*

To reconstruct your breast(s), your surgeon may have placed a tissue expander in the breast pocket to stretch the skin. For the next step, your surgeon will remove the expander and replace it with a breast implant.

This process is also used for patients who currently have breast implants and are having an *implant exchange* procedure.

If you are getting an implant for reconstruction in only one of your breasts, you may choose to place an implant in your other breast to help your breasts look more even. This is called *augmentation*.

#### *Gender-affirming care*

For augmentation, your surgeon will place breast implant(s) on top of or beneath your *pectoralis* muscle. This muscle connects the front wall of your chest with your shoulder. Your surgeon will do this surgically through a small incision in the natural crease of your chest.

### Post-Surgical Garment

- You will be provided with a *surgical bra* on the day of surgery. Wear the surgical bra 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 4 weeks. Only take it off to wash it or to do daily hygiene.
  - You may purchase a front clasp sports bra (non-underwire) to wear instead if you like. This needs to be snug and supportive.
- Your provider may ask you to continue wearing the surgical bra for more than 4 weeks. This will be determined during your post-surgical follow-up appointment.

## Incision Care and Healing

- Remove the outermost bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Usually, this dressing is gauze and tape.
- If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave the bandage on until it falls off. If it does not fall off on its own, we will remove it during your first follow-up appointment.

## Hygiene

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use mild soap and wash your incisions very gently.
- 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.

## Activity and Return to Work

- For 4 weeks, move your arms gently:
  - Do **not** raise your arm above shoulder height on your surgical side.
  - Do **not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.
  - Avoid repetitive arm movements such as chores (vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry)
  - Avoid *aerobic exercise* (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Walking is encouraged, 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.
- Return to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please discuss what may be best for you with your surgeon.

## Drains

- If you had drains placed at the time of surgery, we will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout “Caring for Your JP Drains.”

## Sleep Position

- Sleep on your back for 4 weeks after surgery, with your head slightly raised. After that, you may sleep on your side.
  - It may be helpful to stack pillows, use a wedge pillow, or sleep in a recliner to keep your head raised.
- Do not sleep on your stomach for 3 months after surgery.

## Pain Control

- Each person's experience with implants is different. Some people only have mild discomfort, and others have stronger pain. It's normal to feel soreness in chest and back muscles, or feel shooting pains. This will improve with time.
- Please read the handout "Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery."
- Please do not use ice or heat directly on your breast implants.

## Special Precautions

- Please discuss surveillance for implant rupture with your surgeon. **Breast MRI without contrast** is recommended after 5-6 years, then every 2-3 years thereafter. Your primary care provider can order this scan.
- We will give you a copy of an implant patient decision checklist. This is an FDA requirement and discusses the risks of implants from the manufacturer.
  - Please initial and sign this document, then return in one of the following ways:
    - bring the document to clinic during an appointment
    - bring on the day of surgery
    - take photos and send to your surgeon on MyChart.
- Please read the handout "Preventing Infection After Breast Implant or Expander."

### **When to Contact the Care Team:**

Please contact your care team immediately if you experience any of the following:

- 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
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer eased by your pain medicine

**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.**

### **Who to Contact**

**During Clinic Hours  
(Monday through Friday  
except holidays, 8am to  
5pm):**

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Please include a photo if applicable.

Alternatively, 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.