

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. Next, 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 1 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 through a small incision in the natural crease of your chest.

Post-Surgical Garment

- We will give you a *surgical bra* on the day of surgery. Wear this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 4 weeks. Only take it off to wash it or to do daily hygiene.
 - If you prefer, you can buy a sports bra (without underwire) that clasps in the front. Make sure it is snug and supportive.
- You may need to continue wearing the surgical bra for more than 4 weeks. Your provider will talk with you about this during your post-surgical follow-up appointment.

Incision Care and Healing

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



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Hygiene

- Take a shower 48 hours after surgery. Taking a shower every day will 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 every day is an important part of 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.
- When you can return to work 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 during your surgery, we will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout “Caring for Your JP Drains.”
- You will take antibiotic medications until the last drain is removed.

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 your chest and back muscles, or to feel shooting pains. This will get better over time.
- Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.”
- Do **not** use ice or heat directly on your breast implants.

Important Safety Instructions

- Talk with your surgeon about checking your implants for rupture (damage). **Breast MRI without contrast** is recommended after 5-6 years, then every 2-3 years after that. Your primary care provider can order this scan.
- We will give you a copy of an **implant patient decision checklist**, prepared by the manufacturer. This is an FDA requirement and discusses the risks of implants. Please initial and sign this document, then return it in 1 of the following ways:
 - Bring it to the clinic during an appointment
 - Bring it on the day of surgery
 - Take photos and send them to your surgeon on MyChart
- Please read the handout “Preventing Infection After Breast Implant or Expander.”

When to Contact the Care Team:

Contact your care team immediately if you have 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 helped by your pain medicine

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

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

Questions?

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

If you have any questions or concerns, message your surgeon through MyChart. Please include a photo if needed.

You may also 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.