

Implant Removal and/or Flat Closure

For breast reconstruction

This handout explains what to expect, how to prepare, and how to plan for your recovery after implant removal and/or flat closure.



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phone camera for
a digital copy of
this handout.*

Aesthetic Flat Closure

Aesthetic flat closure is a surgery done by your breast surgeon or plastic surgeon, which creates a smooth chest contour. Excess skin, fat, and tissue are removed to create a flat appearance. This can be done at the time of a mastectomy related to breast cancer.

This surgery may or may not include a *free nipple graft*, which involves removing your natural nipple and attaching it into the appropriate location on your chest. Please discuss the option of a free nipple graft with your surgeon. We will provide additional information if this is a part of your surgical plan. We will provide separate instructions for this procedure.

Implant Removal

Some patients who have had breast reconstruction before wish to have their implants removed without replacing them. This could be because of painful *capsular contracture* (scar tissue) or personal preference. Removing an implant might involve *capsulectomy* (removal of scar tissue) or *capsulotomy* (partial removal or release of scar tissue).

Incision Care and Healing

- You will likely wake up in a surgical bra or compression wrap. If so, wear this garment for 4 weeks after your surgery. Remove it for showering and laundering.
 - You may purchase a front-clasp sports bra (non-underwire) or a compression vest to wear instead if you like. This needs to be snug and supportive.
- Remove the outermost dressing from your surgical site 48 hours after surgery. Do this before you shower for the first time. If your incision has thin strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave them in place until they fall off. If the Steri-Strips are still in place when you come to the clinic for your first follow-up visit, your provider will remove them.
- You may experience numbness to your surgical site. Your surgical sites may be bruised and swollen.

Hygiene

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. 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 drains placed at the time of surgery. We will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout “Closed Bulb Drain Care: For a Jackson-Pratt (JP) or Blake drain” to learn more.

Activities and Return to Work

- For 4 weeks, move your arms gently:
 - Do **not** reach your arm above shoulder height on the side of the surgery.
 - 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 (for example, vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry).
- Avoid *aerobic exercise* (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Walking is encouraged and is helpful for healing and rebuilding strength. 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 talk with your surgeon about what may be best for you.

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.

Pain Control

- Please read the handout “Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery.”
- Do **not** use ice or heat directly on your surgical sites.

When to Contact the Care Team:

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 helped by your pain medicine

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

Please go to the ER (emergency room) if you experience any of these: redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb. Any of these may be signs of a blood clot.

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, 8am to 5pm):**

If you have any questions or concerns, we recommend messaging 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.