

Latissimus Flap Breast Reconstruction

What to expect and how to prepare

This handout explains latissimus flap breast reconstruction. It includes how to prepare, what to expect, care instructions for recovery, and when to call your doctor or nurse.



Scan this QR code with your phone camera to access a digital copy of this handout.

What is the latissimus muscle?

The latissimus muscle is on your upper back. It is the muscle that allows you to push your arm down; the muscle is used in climbing and swimming.

The latissimus muscle is often used along with a breast implant for breast reconstruction. If you have had radiation, some of your radiated skin will be removed and replaced with the skin that is moved from your back. You will generally be admitted to the hospital for 1-3 nights after this surgery.

If your breast reconstruction plan includes a breast implant being placed beneath the latissimus flap, a tissue expander is typically placed first. **Please see the “Tissue Expanders for Breast Reconstruction” handout if this applies to you.**

Incision Care and Healing

- You will have an incision on your back on the same side as your breast reconstruction. It will be about 6 to 8 inches long.
- The type of chest incision you have will depend on the type of mastectomy you had.
- Remove the outermost dressing on your breast 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. Generally, this is gauze and tape.
- If your incision has 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.
- In general, you will not wear a bra for the first 4 weeks after surgery. You may wear the post-mastectomy camisole or surgical bra if you were given one after surgery. Otherwise, do not wear any bra or compressive (tight) clothing for 4 weeks.

Hygiene

- Please take a shower 48 hours after surgery. Do this after the outer dressing has been removed. 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 arm(s) gently:
 - Avoid raising your arm on the side of surgery past 45 degrees to your side. Avoid closing your arm less than 30 degrees toward your body. We recommend keeping a pillow under your armpit to avoid pressure on the blood flow.
 - Do not reach your arm to the front above shoulder level.
 - 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) for 4 weeks.
- 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 with your surgeon what may be best for you.

Sleep Position

- Sleep on your back for 4 weeks after surgery, with your head slightly raised.
- 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.”
- Please do not use ice or heat directly on your surgical sites.

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 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.

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 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.