

POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS: BREAST RECONSTRUCTION

IMPORTANT: Call Dr. Holzman immediately if you experience excessive bleeding, pain or if you notice a sudden enlargement of the surgically treated areas.

FIRST 24 HOURS: Take your pain and nausea medications at regular intervals. Begin advancing to a regular diet as tolerated. If you feel nauseated, drink clear fluids and eat simple, easily digested foods like broth based soups, saltine crackers, applesauce or plain, steamed rice. Keep the incision site clean and dry, and replace any wet gauze quickly.

DRESSINGS: The front closure sports bra that you bring with you to surgery will be part of your postoperative dressing so that tape is not used on the delicate skin of the surgical site. The bra also acts to hold the reconstructed breast(s) in good position. Dry gauze will be placed inside the bra to absorb any drainage. There is no reason to disturb the dressings unless they become saturated, and then the soiled gauze may be replaced. At the first post-operative visit, which is usually on the fifth or sixth day after surgery, Dr. Holzman will remove the bra and dressings to examine the reconstruction and incisions. Additional instructions may be provided at that time if there are any changes to the dressing protocol. Dr. Holzman uses absorbable sutures that do not require removal.

BATHING: You may take a sitz bath immediately after surgery. Run about 3 inches of tepid water into your bathtub, and carefully sit in the tub. Please take care to keep your dressings and incisions dry during this bath. Be careful getting in and out of the tub. If you slip and put pressure on your upper body, you may cause bleeding in your surgical site. If you do not feel safe getting into the tub, a sponge bath may be preferable. You may take a full shower 5 days postoperatively. For your shower, carefully remove your bra. Do not scrub the incisions. Carefully pat the area dry. Replace your bra and place new, dry 4x4 gauze (or a panty liner) in the bra if you notice any drainage to keep the bra clean and dry.

ACTIVITY: Sleep on your back with your head and chest slightly elevated for the first week after surgery. Refrain from aerobic exercise, driving and lifting more than 10 pounds until you see Dr. Holzman for your first postoperative visit. At that time, activity restrictions may be loosened, depending on your individual progress. You may not drive for 2 weeks postoperatively or longer if you are still requiring narcotic pain medication or muscle relaxants.

DRAIN CARE: If a drain or drains were inserted at the time of surgery, please make sure to document the drainage amount on the drain care sheet in your surgery packet. The drain prevents blood and fluid from accumulating in the surgical site. If you shower, do not let the drain dangle by the stitch that keeps it in position. It will be uncomfortable and they may pull out. Use a shoestring placed through the loop on the drain and drape it around your neck. Please make sure to bring your drain record to all of your appointments with Dr. Holzman.

HEALING: If both breasts were surgically treated, it is common for the two sides to heal differently. One side may have more swelling or may seem more uncomfortable. Lost sensation is an unfortunate byproduct of mastectomy, caused when delicate nerves are severed as breast tissue is removed. Just how much sensation is regained, and to what degree, varies greatly between individuals. Many women regain some sensation as the cutaneous nerves regenerate. Typically, women remain numb in the front of the breast, regaining sensation primarily in the outer perimeters of the breast. Some patients experience tingling, burning or shooting pain as the sensory nerves regenerate. This will disappear with time and should not cause alarm. The skin over your chest may appear shiny as a result of the swelling that occurs after surgery. The swelling will subside in a few weeks, and the skin will appear more normal. Some patients experience itching along their incision lines. Please take Benadryl if this occurs so that you do not accidentally disrupt your incisions by scratching. You will notice moderate swelling and bruising after your surgery. This is normal and will resolve over the next 4-12 weeks. All new scars appear red, pink or purplish. Scars on the chest may take a year or longer to fade. Avoid sun exposure to these areas, and ask Dr. Holzman about medical grade scar reduction treatments that are available. As always, apply sunscreen to areas that will receive sun exposure.