

Breast Surgery: Discharge Instructions

The following provides helpful information to assist in your recovery from breast surgery. Keep in mind that no two people recover in the same way. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk with your doctor or nurse.

What to Expect

It may take up to 4 weeks to recover fully from surgery. Recovery time may be longer for patients having reconstruction.

General Guidelines

Listen to your body and rest when you feel tired. Do not lift anything over 10 lbs. with the arm on your surgical side. Gradually increase your activities. As directed by your surgeon (usually 48 hours after surgery), begin arm exercises.* Do the arm exercises 2 to 3 times a day for 10 minutes. This is important to keep your arm and shoulder flexible and regain full range of motion. Refer to Northwestern Memorial's guide, *Regaining Resiliency after Breast Cancer Surgery*, or other guidelines provided by your nurse.

*Note: If you had any type of breast reconstruction, do not exercise until you talk with your plastic surgeon.

Activities

You may shower 24 hours after surgery. Tub baths also are allowed, but do not soak your incision or drain site. If you have a drain, you may pin it to a belt or beaded necklace while bathing. It is important to support the drainage tube and bulb while taking a tub bath or shower.

*Please ask
your doctor
or nurse
if you have
any questions.*

Diet

You may resume your regular diet.

Driving

Do not drive until you receive your surgeon's permission. Do not drive while taking pain medicine.

Returning to Work

Depending on your work and its demands, you may return to work after your first follow-up visit with your doctor, usually 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.

Medications

Check with your doctor before taking any routine medicines. Pain medicine is prescribed before you leave the hospital. Use as directed. It is important to be comfortable enough to keep moving. Take pain medicine 20 to 30 minutes prior to doing your arm exercises. If you are taking narcotic pain medicine or sleeping pills, do not drink any alcohol. Drink plenty of fluids to help prevent constipation. If needed, you may take an over-the-counter stool softener (such as Colace[®] or Metamucil[®]).

For mild discomfort, you may take plain Tylenol[®] (acetaminophen). Do not exceed 4,000 mg of Tylenol (acetaminophen) in 24 hours. In general, narcotic pain medications also have Tylenol in them.

Contact your doctor if you have severe pain not controlled by your medication.

Wound Care

The incision dressing may be removed 24 hours after surgery. Sutures under the skin dissolve on their own. The small paper strips (Steri-Strips[™]) over the wound remain in place for 7 to 10 days. If they do not fall off on their own, your doctor will remove them at your follow-up visit. You can expect some minor swelling and numbness at the incision, along with bruising of the breast. Wearing a soft support bra, even at night, may help ease any discomfort.

After bathing, carefully pat the incision dry. Do not apply any cream or ointment to the incision site. Do not shave the affected underarm area until you have your doctor's permission.

Drain Care (if placed at time of surgery)

You may have one or more drains after surgery. If so, empty the drain and “strip” (milk) the tube 3 times a day, or more often if the bulb fills up. This prevents the tube from clogging. (See instructions that follow.) If fluid leaks from the drain site, the tube may be clogged. This is not an emergency. Gently strip the tube 4 to 5 times until fluid begins flowing through the tube. If leakage around the tube persists and there is no fluid in the tubing, contact your doctor. Do not take the drain apart.

Record your output each time you empty the bulb. Measure the amount in milliliters (mls), as marked on the measuring cup. Call your surgeon’s office as instructed or when the 24-hour drain output is 30 ml or less for 2 days in a row. Often, the tube can be removed when the drainage has decreased to this level.

Stripping the Drain

Carefully wash your hands. To strip the drain, start at the top of the tube, next to your body:

- Firmly hold the tube to stabilize in one hand and squeeze the tube.
- With the other hand, squeeze and slowly slide your thumb and index finger about 2 inches down the tube and pinch (See Figure 1).
- Move the hand (closest to your body) and grasp the tube just below where the tube is pinched.
- Repeat step 2 until you have “milked” the entire length of the tube.

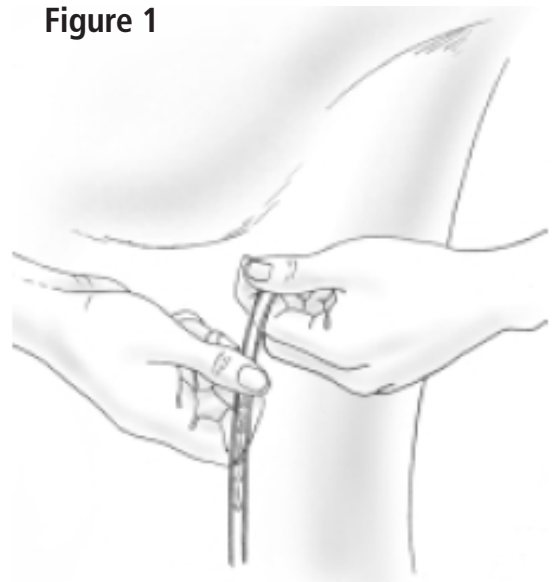


Figure 1

Reposition your hands as you move away from the body. Always stabilize the tube with one hand while stripping the tubing with the other. This prevents the drain from being pulled out while you are stripping it.

Strip the tube 2 to 3 times daily.

Note: If you are right-handed, it may be helpful to stabilize the tube with your left hand and strip with the right. If left-handed, stabilize with the right and strip with the left.

Emptying the Drain

1. Assemble supplies
 - Record sheet
 - Measuring cup.
2. Wash your hands.
3. Carefully strip the drain until you reach the drainage bulb (See *Stripping the Drain*).
4. Uncap the bulb spout and gently squeeze the contents into the measuring cup.
5. Squeeze the bulb fully to remove as much air as possible and replace the cap while squeezing. (This causes suction to draw the fluid into the drain.)
6. Measure and record the fluid, then discard the fluid in the toilet. Use the chart at the end of this brochure to record drainage. (Note: If you have more than one drainage tube, each is labeled either with a number or letter. Be sure to separately record each amount in the correct column.)
7. Carefully wash your hands.

When to Call Your Doctor

Notify your surgeon if any of following occur:

- Temperature higher than 101.5° F or any shaking chills
- Unusual redness, swelling, tenderness, warmth or drainage from the incision or drain site (It is normal to have some slight redness, about the size of a dime, at the drain site. If this increases, report this change.)
- Severe pain not controlled by your pain medicine

If you have any questions or concerns, please call your doctor or nurse.

Important Phone Numbers

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

Bulb Drain Record

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
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Bulb Drain Record

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24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

Date	Time	Drain 1 or A	Drain 2 or B
24 Hour Total			

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Developed by: Department of Surgical Nursing and Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center

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