



**DR. WISAM MENESI, MD, FRCSC**

**Cosmetic and Reconstructive Plastic Surgery**

103-457 Bishop Drive  
Fredericton, NB  
E3C 2M6

Telephone: (506) 455-1188  
Fax: (506) 455-1189

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## **Postoperative Instructions for Breast Reconstruction**

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

- Have someone drive you home after surgery and help you at home for 1-2 days.
- Follow balanced diet.
- Decreased activity may promote constipation, add fruit to your diet and increase fluid intake.
- Take pain medication as prescribed. Do not take aspirin or any products containing aspirin.
- Do not drink alcohol when taking pain medications.
- No alcohol for 3 weeks.
- Do not smoke, as smoking delays healing and increases the risk of complications.

### **ACTIVITIES**

- Start walking as soon as possible, as this helps to reduce swelling and lowers the chance of blood clots.
- Do not drive until you are no longer taking any pain medications (narcotics).
- Do not drive until you have full range of motion with your arms.
- Avoid vigorous exercise and activities are restricted for 6 weeks. No heavy lifting, pulling or pushing.
- Return to work in 2-5 weeks (Depends on job).

### **INCISION CARE**

- Keep surgical tapes in place until they start to fall off themselves, at least two weeks.
- Keep incisions dry all the time
- If you have drains, no shower or tub soaking while drains are in place. You may shower 48 hours after removal of drains. If you don't have drains, you may shower 3 days after the surgery.
- May pad incisions with dressings for comfort.
- Sleep on your back for at least two weeks.
- Avoid any pressure on your breasts.
- If your breast skin is very dry after surgery, you can apply a moisturizer 1-2 times a day, but avoid the incisions.
- Avoid exposing scars to sun for at least 12 months.
- Always use sunblock, if sun exposure is unavoidable (SPF 30 or greater).

### **WHAT TO EXPECT**

- You may experience temporary pain, soreness, or numbness of around the incisions.
- You may have bruising and swelling. The majority of bruising and swelling will subside in 2-4 weeks.
- Normal sensation to the breast cannot be restored; in time, some feeling may return.
- Reconstructed breast may feel firmer and look rounder or flatter than natural breast.
- Reconstructed breast may not match natural breast.
- Scars will be reddened for few weeks. They will fade and soften over time, it takes up to 12 months for the scars to mature.
- You may feel tired for several weeks.
- All Sutures are dissolvable.

### **FOLLOW-UP CARE**

- If you have drains, the drains are removed when less than 30 ml for 24 hours, usually after 1-2 days.
- You need to wear the surgical bra for at least 6 weeks. Avoid bras with underwires for 3 months.
- If you had breast reconstruction based on abdominal flap, you would need to wear abdominal binder for at least 6 weeks.
- If you had tissue expander, the expansion with saline is usually started 2 or 3 weeks after surgery based on wound healing.

### **WHEN TO CALL**

- If you have sudden painful swelling or bruising.
  - If swelling and redness persist after a few days.
  - If you have increased redness along the incision.
  - If you have severe or increased pain not relieved by medication.
  - If you have any yellowish or greenish drainage from the incisions or notice a foul odor.
  - If you have bleeding from the incisions that is difficult to control with light pressure.
- If you have sever pain and swelling to one leg or unusual shortness of breath.