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Postoperative Instructions

TISSUE EXPANSION FOR BREAST RECONSTRUCTION

This surgery may be performed immediately at the time of mastectomy or delayed for a later time. If done immediately, a 1-day hospital stay for the mastectomy is expected. If done in a delayed fashion, this is an outpatient procedure.

Have someone drive you home after surgery and help you at home for 1-2 days.

Get plenty of rest; follow balanced diet.

Decreased activity and pain medication may promote constipation, so you may want to add more fresh fruit to your diet, and be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

Take pain medication as prescribed. Do not take aspirin or any products containing aspirin until approved by your physician.

Do not drink alcohol when taking pain medication.

If you are taking vitamins with iron, resume these as tolerated.

Do not smoke, as smoking delays healing and increases the risk of complications.

Activities

Walk as soon as possible, as this helps reduce swelling and lowers the chance of blood clots.

Do not drive until you are no longer taking narcotic pain medications.

Do not drive until you have full range of motion with your arms.

Refrain from vigorous activity for 4-6 weeks. Increase activity gradually as tolerated.

Resume social and employment activities in approximately 2 weeks.

You cannot perform household chores or heavy lifting greater than 5 to 10 pounds for 6 weeks after surgery.

No hot tubs, swimming in lakes while the tissue expander is in place.

You may participate in post-mastectomy physical therapy beginning 2 weeks after surgery.

Beware:

DO NOT HAVE AN MRI WITH YOUR TISSUE EXPANDER IN PLACE

The tissue expanders may be detected via the security scanners at the airport. You will need a note from your Doctor if you plan to travel indicating you have tissue expanders in place with metal.

Incision Care

You can shower 48 hours after the last drain tube has removed.

Avoid sun exposure to scars for at least 12 months after your last surgery.

If sun exposure is unavoidable then always use a sun block with 35 SPF or higher.

Keep the incisions clean, dry and inspect for signs of infection.

You can use moisturizer on the incisions and surrounding skin starting 3 weeks.

What to Expect After Tissue Expansion

You may experience minor discomfort for the following 12 to 24 hours after each tissue expansion. This discomfort usually subsides 2 to 3 days after each tissue expansion.

The tissue expander may shift after the 1st or 2nd expansion.

You may experience more discomfort on one side than the other if you have bilateral tissue expanders placed.

Your posture may change causing you to have some upper and/or mid back pain as you are expanded.

Your shoulder range of motion may become stiff requiring continued shoulder exercises during the tissue expansion process to prevent shoulder stiffness or a frozen shoulder.

You may find it difficult to sleep because you feel tightness across the chest and shoulders.

You may find it difficult to fit into certain types of tight fitting clothing. You may need to wear oversized shirts until the final exchange of the tissue expander(s).

You may feel chest persistent tightness or heaviness secondary to being expanded. This usually subsides with time.

The tissue expanders will remain in place for a minimum of 10 weeks after completing the last tissue expansion. This will allow for the soft tissues (i.e. skin and muscle) to heal and recover from being stretched before the second surgery takes place for the exchange of the tissue expander for a permanent breast implant.

You'll see Dr. Wendel thinks you have achieved your desired breast size to determine if additional expansions are necessary and for surgical planning.

Treatment for Discomfort

Ibuprofen (or other NSAID's) 400-600 mg by mouth every 6-8 hours with food starting the morning of each tissue expansion and continue to take around the clock for 3-5 days as needed for discomfort. You can start ibuprofen 2 weeks after surgery.

If you need additional pain control at night, you may take the prescribed narcotic pain medication you were prescribed for pain immediately after surgery.

You can take the ibuprofen with the pain medication if additional pain relief is required. If the discomfort does not subside or you cannot get relief, please call the clinic for further guidance, (615) 921-2100.

Desired Breast Size

This is determined on an individual basis.

There is no scientific way to determine the exact breast size. It will be determined by a number of different factors including:

How well you tolerate each tissue expansion.

How well your skin reacts to the expansions.

The size of the other breast (if a one-side tissue expander).

Previous surgeries or amount of scarring
Dr. Wendel recommends trying on a desired bra size as you approach your desired breast size to see how well the bra size fits.

Appearance

While the tissue is being expanded, a bulge will be created. Depending upon the location of the tissue expander, the bulge may be considered desirable or unsightly.

Following the exchange of the tissue expander, a more normal and desirable look should be restored.

After the exchange of the tissue expander for the saline or silicone implant, the breasts will feel softer with less fullness in your armpit.

When To Call

If you have increasing 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 side effects to medications; such as, rash, nausea, headache, vomiting, etc.

If you have an oral temperature of 100.5 degrees or higher.

If you have any yellow or greenish drainage from the incisions or notice a foul smell.

If you have bleeding from the incisions that is difficult to control with light pressure.

If you have loss of feeling or motion

For Medical Questions, Please Call:

(615) 921-2100 Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM-5:00 PM and Fridays 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM. After hours and on weekends, the answering service will contact Dr. Wendel or the plastic surgeon on call.