

## **PRE AND POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR BREAST RECONSTRUCTION WITH TISSUE EXPANDERS**

### **BEFORE SURGERY**

- Please read all of the information in your pre-op packet three times: immediately after your appointment, the day before your surgery and again after surgery to ensure you remember the details.
- By planning ahead, you can have a more relaxed recovery phase. Fill your prescriptions, stock the house with comfort foods and arrange a comfy place to sleep. Remember that you will need a ride to the first few post-op appointments.
- **NO SMOKING one month before and after surgery.**

### **THE DAY OF SURGERY**

- Make sure that you do not eat, drink, smoke or chew anything (except approved medications) for 8 hours before surgery.
- Know where to go and when to be there.
- Please do not forget your pre-op packet.
- Wear comfortable clothing, preferably something that you do not have to pull over your head.

### **THE FIRST WEEK**

- Most people stay one night in the hospital. You will be able to go home once you are able to tolerate food and pain medication can be taken orally.
- The car ride home can cause nausea. Taking Dramamine prior to discharge from the hospital can help prevent a problem.
- Once home, find a nice place to settle where you can sleep on your back with your head elevated about 30 degrees. Keep your medications, fluids, and (if necessary) something to throw up into close by. Work on deep breathing to keep your lungs expanded.
- Start your antibiotics at the next mealtime once you are home and all other medications as needed or directed.
- Keep your arm (or arms, if bilateral) within 12 inches of your side. Do not reach, lift, push or pull with your arms. Pretend that your elbows are stuck to your sides.
- You do not need to remove your dressings unless there is a problem or you have been given specific instructions. Unhooking your bra 1-2 times a day is fine to look for any redness or complications. A bloody stain may occur along the sides of the surgery bra. This is nothing to worry about, but it usually means the drain has a kink in it or is clogged. Strip the drain and be sure it is functioning properly.
- Strip and record the output from each drain two-three times per day. Keep a record of the 24 hour totals from each side and bring this information to your follow-up appointment. The drainage will start off looking like blood and will gradually lighten to a pink or yellow color. Drains are removed when the output is less than 30 cc's in a 24-hour period.
- Low grade temperatures (99-101°) usually result from not breathing deeply enough. Be sure that you take 10 deep breaths an hour and get out of bed regularly. Your temperature should get better with this alone. With continued or higher fevers, other things to check are redness at your I.V. site, burning when you urinate and/or tenderness in your calves. Bad signs are increasing redness, persistent vomiting or diarrhea. Let us know immediately if you experience any of these symptoms.

- It is fine to bathe the area outside of the bra. You may want to have your hair washed and styled, but you should not do this yourself during the first week since it will mean lifting your arms. No shower when you have drains in.
- Itchiness under the bra may improve with Benadryl taken orally, or applying hydrocortisone cream to the skin (as long as it is not on the incision). You can also remove the bra and put on a soft shirt then put the bra back on over the shirt so you have something soft against your skin.
- When you come back for your first follow-up appointment, we will change you into a more comfortable bra or camisole. We recommend that you purchase either a soft bra or bra without cups or a post-op camisole. Avoid underwire and lace bras.
- Everyone experiences pain differently. Some people feel fine right after surgery, while others are sore for up to six weeks. **YOU SHOULD NOT DRIVE** for two weeks after surgery or for as long as you remain on pain medication or muscle relaxants (whichever is longer). Most people are still sore enough the third week that their reaction time behind the wheel of the car will slow. Unless you fell completely normal, do not drive the third week either.

### **THE SECOND WEEK**

- Wear your bra at all times and continue following arm movement and sleeping precautions as described in the instructions for week one.
- Specific care of your incisions will be decided at your follow-up appointment.
- You can shower after your drains come out. Allow water to fall on your back and shoulders rather than directly on your chest.

### **THE THIRD AND FOURTH WEEKS**

- You probably will be feeling much better by this time. If you are off your pain pills and are feeling fine, you can start driving.
- There are often areas along your incision that take longer to heal. Make sure that you understand wound care recommendations made at your appointment and follow them.
- Where the incision is completely healed you can start using a scar cream.
- You may feel a sharp bump along your incision or get an irritated pimple that is likely a “spitting” suture, i.e., one that is coming up to the surface. Keep it clean and make an appointment to have it removed. You can dress it with bacitracin and a dry gauze until you make it into the office.
- Keep wearing your bra or camisole at all times until your tissue expansion has started. The timing of your expansion will depend on the healing of your mastectomy flaps, pain level and chemotherapy schedule (if needed).

### **LONG TERM**

- You can start exercising regularly one month after surgery. Start slow and let pain be your guide.
- Your second stage surgery (placement of the final implants) can be performed three months after your tissue expanders are full if no chemotherapy is required. If chemo/radiation is requested, a longer period of time is necessary prior to the second stage surgery.
- If you are having dental work during this process, please ask your dentist or us for a prophylactic antibiotic for the first year after surgery. We would like for you to wait at least 3 months before having any dental work done. If you have had radiation you should take a prophylactic antibiotic indefinitely before any dental work.