

Recovery and Going Home



My Recovery Planner

Instructions: Add today's date (1st day after surgery) in the appropriate day of the week on the first row of your calendar and then mark the discharge date you have been given. You will likely have follow-up appointments after discharge. Mark your follow-up appointments on the calendar.

*The first day AFTER surgery is DAY #1. For example, if surgery is on Monday, Day #1 is Tuesday.
Most patients go home on DAY #3 – use following discharge

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

After Your Breast Surgery

Activity & Restrictions:

- Walk at least 3 times daily. It is normal to feel a little tired.
- Do not lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 5 pounds until cleared by your doctor.
- Do not drive while on pain medications, with drains in place, or if you feel you are not able to react quickly in an emergency.
- No contact sports, swimming, or soaking in pools or tubs.
- Avoid straining and strenuous activities, such as running or basketball, until cleared.
- Avoid extending arms over shoulder level, though some gentle range-of-motion exercises may be acceptable.
- You may shower 2 days after surgery or when soiled. Do not rub or scrub your surgical sites. Gently pat dry with a clean towel.
- Do not lay on your stomach or put pressure on your surgical sites or drain(s).

Time Table

- Y: yes, activities you can do
- N: no, activities you cannot do

Activity	After 48 hours	After week 2	When drains are out	When cleared by doctor
Shower	Y	Y	Y	Y
Walk up and down stairs	Y	Y	Y	Y
Begin physical therapy	N	N	Y	Y
Drink caffeine/eat chocolate	N	Y	Y	Y
Wear a bra	N	N	N	Y
Lift, push, or pull under 5 pounds	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stand straight up	Y	Y	Y	Y
Travel by car	Y	Y	Y	Y
Travel by plane	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lay on side	N	N	Y	Y
Do abdominal exercise	N	N	N	Y
Lift arms above shoulder level	N	N	N	Y
Take ibuprofen	Y	Y	Y	Y
Take aspirin	N	Y	Y	Y
Engage in sexual activity	N	N	N	Y
Drive	N	N	Y	Y
Return to work	N	N	Y	Y
Lay flat	Y	Y	Y	Y
Engage in strenuous exercise	N	N	N	Y
Drink alcohol	N	N	Y	Y

Bra:

- Do not wear a bra until approved by your surgical team.

Diet:

- Drink plenty of water.
- If you are not on a special diet consider foods rich in fruits, vegetables, and lean protein. If you are on a special diet, please talk with your surgeon about recommendations.
- Avoid fried and fatty foods for the first 24 hours after surgery.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medication.

Dressings/Wound Care:

- Leave all surgical dressings in place for up to 1 week.
- If you have a wound vacuum(s), leave it in place.

- If no dressings are in place, keep the incisions clean, dry, and open to air and wash your incisions with soap and water in the shower daily. Pat dry.
- If you have drainage, cover with clean, dry gauze and change daily and as needed.
- Any surgical glue will fall off naturally. Do not pick at the surgical glue.
- If you have steri-strips, leave them on until they fall off.

Follow-up Appointment:

If you do not have a follow-up appointment already scheduled, please call 443-997-9466 to schedule an appointment 1 week after discharge with a nurse or physician assistant.

Medications:

You will be prescribed many medications following surgery, some of which may include:

- Acetaminophen/Tylenol
 - Tylenol may help control post-operative pain.
 - Do not take more than 4,000 mg, or 4 g, in 24 hours.
 - This medication is for pain and does not need to be taken if you are not in pain.
- Antibiotics
 - Antibiotics may help prevent post-operative infection(s).
 - You must take antibiotics until the last surgical drain is removed.
 - Remember to take this medication with food in your stomach. Consider also yogurt and a probiotic while taking antibiotics.
- Celecoxib/Celebrex
 - Celebrex may help control post-operative pain and swelling.
 - This medication is for pain and does not need to be taken if you are not in pain.
- Gabapentin/Neurontin
 - Gabapentin may help control post-operative nerve-related pain.
 - This medication is for pain and does not need to be taken if you are not in pain.
- Oxycodone/Roxicodone
 - Oxycodone may help control post-operative pain.
 - This medication is for pain and does not need to be taken if you are not in pain.
 - Oxycodone is to be used **only for breakthrough pain**. This means that if you are experiencing pain, first consider taking the other non-narcotic pain medications that were prescribed.
 - Do not use other narcotic pain medications, consume alcohol, or drive while taking Oxycodone.

Note that all of these prescribed medications are safe to take concurrently. Do not use other acetaminophen products while taking Tylenol. Do not use other ibuprofen products while taking Celebrex.

Pathology Results:

If applicable, pathology results come from your oncologist. Please contact his/her office for results.

Surgical Drains

The drains will “pull” extra tissue fluid from the body and help with healing. The drainage will be bloody at first and may turn pink, yellow, or orange. Sometimes you will see blood clots or bits of tissue in the fluid. This is normal. **You will have the drain(s) for at least 3-4 weeks. The first drain will be removed around week 2 or 3.**

Emptying and Recording Your Drainage (step-by step)

1. Wash hands.
2. Strip drain tubing.
3. Open drain cap and pour drainage in measuring cup.
4. Squeeze bulb while closing the cap.
5. Record drainage (mL's or cc's) for each drain.
6. Pour drainage in toilet and rinse measuring cup. **NEVER** rinse your drain with water.
7. Wash hands. Do this at least twice daily.

Drain Dressings:

If there is a blue circular patch over the drain site(s), **do not remove.**

- This dressing is waterproof, so you may shower with it in place.
- If the patch becomes soiled or comes off, wash the drain site daily with soap and water, then cover with dry gauze. Gauze may be bought at most pharmacies and grocery stores.

If there is no blue circular patch under your dressing, remove the dressing two days after surgery:

- Wash the drain site with soap and water, then apply a new gauze dressing to the site after the shower.
- The drain can wet when you are in the shower. Remember, no soaking.

Protect Your Flap

- Try to sleep in a recliner to avoid laying on your flap.
- **DO NOT** lay on your sides or stomach for **6 weeks** after surgery.
- If flap tissue came from your buttock, for the **first 1-2 weeks**, do not bend your hips more than 90 degrees (do not sit upright in a chair; however, you may be in a recliner chair lying flat with a few pillows, or be standing straight up) and avoid crossing your legs to promote healing of your incision.
- If flap tissue came from your abdomen, for the **first 1-2 weeks**, bend your knees and use a bent posture while standing or walking, and place a pillow under your knees while lying down to promote healing of your incision.
- **Do not smoke** or be around second-hand smoke after surgery (this constricts blood vessels and impairs healing).
- **AVOID** using ice packs and heating pads – your skin will be numb, so you could get frost-bite or burns.

Questions/Concerns:

Call us at any time if you are worried about your recovery. Call early if you think something is not right.

Call immediately for the following:

- Signs of infection: fever, chills, redness, warmth, swelling, or drainage that is green or white or has suddenly increased in volume.
- Severe pain not relieved by prescribed pain pills.
- Excessive bleeding or bruising.
- Nausea or vomiting for more than 24 hours.
- Shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or chest pain.
- Wound(s) or opening of tissue.
- Problems with the surgical drains, such as a sudden increase or decrease in drainage.

FOR NON-EMERGENCIES:

- During regular office hours (8:00 am - 4:30 pm), call 443-997-9466.
- After hours, call 410-955-5000 or 410-955-6070 and ask for the Plastic Surgery Resident on Call. It may take longer for your phone call to be returned during this time.

FOR EMERGENCIES:

For true emergencies, call 911 or be escorted to the local emergency room. Have them contact our team once you are stable.

Concerns After Discharge



Once you are Discharged



Call us at any time if you are worried about your recovery.

During regular office hours (8:00 am - 4:00 pm) call your surgeon's office.

After hours, call 410-955-5000 and ask for the provider on call for your surgeon.

Call us immediately for the following:

- Signs of infection – fever, chills, redness, warmth, swelling, pain, and unusual drainage.
- Severe pain not relieved by pain medicine.
- Excessive bleeding or bruising.
- Nausea for more than 24 hours.
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Change in the flap site including swelling or breakdown of tissue.
- Problems with the surgical drains (sudden increase or decrease in drainage)

It is generally easier to reach someone between 8:00 am and 3:00 pm, so call early if you think something is not right. A nurse or nurse practitioner is available every day to answer your questions. After hours and on the weekends, the calls go to the resident doctors in the hospital. It may take longer for your phone call to be returned during this time.

If you have a true emergency, such as severe abdominal pain, chest pain, shortness of breath, or any other acute issues, call 911 and go to the local emergency room. Have them contact our team once you are stable.

Activity after Surgery

- Slowly return to your regular diet, avoid fried and fatty foods for the first 24 hours. **Avoid** caffeine and chocolate until instructed by your surgeon.
- You may feel lightheaded while sitting or standing. If this happens move slowly and drink plenty of fluids (water is great).
- Slowly return to your normal activities. You should walk at least 3 times daily. You can do this and climb steps immediately after surgery. Fatigue is normal, it may take 4 to 8 weeks before you feel yourself again. Cluster your activities and rest when needed.
- **Do not drink alcohol** while taking pain medication.

Post-op Appointments and Consults

During the weeks after surgery you will meet with members of your breast reconstruction team, including the:

- **Residents and/or Fellows**
- **Plastic Surgeon**
- **Physician Assistants**
- **Nurses**

Although we do our best to coordinate these clinic appointments for you, it is your responsibility to make sure that you see these clinicians for follow-up. You will meet with **the plastic surgery team's nurse practitioner or nurse** 7-10 days after your surgery to check your wound healing and to manage your surgical drains.

- This appointment should already be scheduled for you and you will receive notification in your preoperative packet.
- If you need to reschedule this appointment, or do not receive notification, please call (443) 997-9466 to schedule.
- You will follow-up with your plastic surgeon 4-6 weeks after your surgery. When ready, they will begin expansion (filling) of the tissue expander.

Coping

People have a variety of emotions when diagnosed with breast cancer – anger, hope, depression, a sense of empowerment, anxiety. They also cope in different ways – time with family and friends, time alone, humor, prayer, communion with nature, meditation, journaling, art and music.

443-997-8282 Ask for –

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/breast_center/treatments_services/support_services/one_on_one_support.html

Some patients find it helpful to connect with another cancer survivor. Please ask us if this is something you would like to do and we will identify someone to match you with a Johns Hopkins Breast Center Survivor Volunteer. Social workers, counselors, and community support groups are also available to help patients and family

members. A cancer diagnosis can also bring challenges of a financial or practical nature. There are a number of groups and resources which can help with meals, transportation, and costs for medication. Check with one of the Breast Center staff.

Plastic Surgery Department Contacts

For Medical Assistance during normal business hours:	
Contact the plastic surgery nurses	(443) 997-9466
For Medical Assistance after normal business or holiday hours:	
Have the plastic surgery resident on call paged	(410) 955-5000
For Administrative Assistance - Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Paperwork, Records, Surgery Date:	
Please consider uploading a copy of your paperwork via MyChart. Alternatively, you can fax documents to (410) 367-2502	
For Appointments:	
To cancel, schedule, or reschedule with any member of the plastic surgery team	(443) 997-9466

