

Home Care after Mastectomy

You have had a mastectomy, surgery to remove your breast. Here are instructions for taking care of yourself after you go home.

The Jackson-Pratt® (JP) Drain

Usually, a gauze bandage will cover the surgical wound and JP drain. The JP drain removes fluid from your wound to help prevent swelling and lower the risk of infection. Your nursing team will show you how to care for the drain before you leave the hospital. If you need a reminder, you can watch a video about taking care of your drain here: <http://bit.ly/2gMvg85>.

Do not drive or do housework until the drain is out. Your doctor will take out the drain when it is no longer needed. This happens during a clinic visit.

Wound Care

If the bandage is dry, leave it in place for 24 hours. If the bandage is moist, you can replace it with a fresh gauze bandage.

Under the gauze, thin bandage strips or a glue for skin cover the wound. Leave these in place until they peel off on their own, in about 2 weeks.

It is best to keep the wound and the area where the drain enters the skin dry. You can shower and pat the area dry. Do not bathe in a tub or Jacuzzi until your doctor says it is OK.

Changing the bandage

If you need to change the bandage, follow these steps:

1. Wash your hands.
2. Remove the old bandage.
3. Clean the area where the stitch holds the tube in place with an alcohol wipe.
4. Put a new bandage on the wound and tube site. Make the bandage large enough to cover the whole area.
5. Tape the bandage in place. Wash your hands again.

Pain Relief and Other Medicines

You will probably have some pain after your surgery. You received a prescription for pain medicine. Please follow your doctor's instructions for taking it.

Keeping control of your pain will help you recover. Talk with your cancer care team if the medicines you take are not working.

The pain medicine your doctor prescribed is a narcotic. Do not drink alcohol or drive while you are taking this pain medicine.

Narcotic pain medicines can cause constipation. Doing these things can help ease it:

- Drink more fluid than usual.
- Eat high-fiber foods such as prunes and bran.
- Be sure to get out of bed for short walks.

If your pain is not severe, you may take ibuprofen or acetaminophen instead. **Do not use ice packs on the mastectomy site.**

Your doctor gave you a prescription for antibiotics to help prevent infection. Please take all of these pills as directed.

Take all of your usual medicines. You may have stopped taking aspirin or blood-thinning medicines before the surgery. Talk with your doctor about when to start these medicines again.

Other Concerns

Diet. You can eat anything you want after the surgery. For the first few days, it is best to eat light meals.

The surgical team put a tube down your throat during the operation. You may have a sore throat for a few days. Choose foods that are easy to swallow until your throat feels better.

Drink 8 to 10 glasses of water and other beverages without caffeine every day.

Our dietitians can help you eat well as you recover. Their services are free of charge. See the Resources section on page 2 for contact information.

Activity. Taking several short walks every day on flat surfaces will help you recover faster. You can use stairs, but take it slow.

For the first week after surgery, it will be hard to lift your arms overhead or to lift heavy items. Limit these activities to what is comfortable for you. Do not try to lift anything that weighs more than a gallon of milk. Talk to your doctor about when to start stretching and lifting your arms above shoulder level.

Other helpful tips. For more comfortable sleep, try raising your upper body a little with pillows. You can also put small pillows under your arms.

Shirts that open in front are easier to put on and take off.

Resources

Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) offers free and low-cost services to help you cope after mastectomy.

Help with emotional distress and practical concerns:

Patient and Family Support

www.huntsmancancer.org/pfs

Help with diet and exercise:

The Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness and Integrative Health Center

www.huntsmancancer.org/wellness

801-587-4585

When to Call for Help

Call right away if any of these things happen:

General

- Vomiting
- Fever over 100.3° F

Wound

- Wound seems not to be healing
- Redness, swelling, or warmth around the wound or tube
- Stitches come loose

Drain Tube

- Tube falls out
- Fluid leaks around tube
- New or more pain around tube

Drainage

- Foul-smelling fluid
- Fluid change from light pink to dark red
- Sudden increase or decrease in the amount of fluid (more than 30 mL, or about 2 tablespoons)

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Call the Center for Breast Health (Clinic 3A) at 801-213-4269.

After hours, weekends, and holidays

Call 801-587-7000. Ask for the surgical resident on call.