

Home Instructions

Listed below are **general** guidelines for all breast cancer surgery recovery. You may have **additional recovery issues or activity restrictions** based on the type of surgery you are having. More information about your surgery can be found on the individual Surgery Fact Sheet, as well as instructions given before you go home after surgery.

AFTER SURGERY: the first 2 days

- ✓ **Wear a bra** during the day and at night to help with comfort and healing.
 - The bra should not be loose or too stretched. The bra should support the breasts to keep them from moving or hanging.
 - Depending on the area of surgery, a non-underwire bra may be more comfortable
 - Any bra that gives relief and feels good should be okay, though many women prefer **sports bras**.

- ✓ For pain relief, you are given an **ice pack** in the recovery room. You may continue to apply the ice-pack to the surgery site, on 20 min and off 20 min, for the rest of the day. You may continue to use it as needed.

- ✓ **Incision:** Stitches are under the skin and dissolve on their own. Some surgeons use surgical glue over the incision. Others use paper tape called steri-strips. They can get wet in the shower. They peel off as you heal. If they do not come off, they will be removed in the office at your post-op visit.

- ✓ Take a **shower** by the 2nd day. Before getting in, take the outside surgical dressing off if you have one. This is usually a square piece of clear tape with a gauze pad underneath it. Do not remove the glue or paper tape directly over the incision. Let soap and water run over the surgery site. Pat the area dry. Place a 4 x 4 gauze pad inside your bra for comfort. Change every day. You can buy gauze pads at your supermarket or pharmacy.

- ✓ You may start wearing **deodorant** a few days after surgery. Avoid the incision area when applying.

- ✓ **Constipation:** Anesthesia and pain medication can cause constipation. Over-the-counter medications, diet, exercise and drinking lots of water can help. Call the office if you are having problems.

- ✓ **Activity:** Small but frequent activity helps in the first 24-48 hours.
 - Get up and move every 2 hours. It can be as simple as standing or taking a walk around the room then sitting back down.
 - Stretch and move your arms naturally. Do not feel like you have to keep your arm locked at your side.
 - No lifting over 8 pounds (gallon of milk); no repetitive activity with the arm.

- ✓ **Deep breathing and relaxation** can help with pain and keep lungs healthy after surgery. You can take deep breaths every 2 hours in the first day or two, or whenever you feel tense during your recovery.
 - **“Relaxation Exercise: Guided Imagery” video.** This can be found in your portal on MyPennMedicine. Type the title under the “Resources” tab to find it.
 - If you do not have a MyPennMedicine account, you can do the following:
 - Sit quietly with good posture.
 - Relax the muscles of your head and neck.
 - Gently turn your neck side to side and roll your shoulders if tense.
 - Take 5-10 deep breaths, slowly breathing in through your nose and out your mouth.
 - If you prefer using an app on your phone, there are many options, for example *Calm* or *Headspace*.

AFTER SURGERY: The next 2-3 weeks

- ✓ **Shower** every day or at least every other day. No swimming or soaking in a tub for about 1 month.

- ✓ Feeling a **lump** in the area of the surgery is **normal**.

- ✓ Most women feel better continuing to wear a **supportive bra** in the day and evening. At this point, you don't have to sleep in it, unless it feels better.

- ✓ **Walking** is good.



- ✓ You should be back to most of your **normal activities** within 3-4 days of surgery, however, **continue**:
 - No lifting over 8 pounds (a gallon of milk)
 - No heavy exercise, for example weight lifting or aerobics
 - Your care team will let you know when you no longer have weight restrictions.

- ✓ **Pathology results** are back in about 7-10 days.
 - You will be called with the results or get them in the office at your post op visit.
 - The results **do not** come through MyPennMedicine.

- ✓ **When to call us**:
 - Temperature of 101 or higher
 - Redness and pain at surgery site with or without a fever

AFTER SURGERY: Getting back to normal

As you are feeling better, don't be discouraged if you suddenly have days where you feel washed out, or have discomfort in the surgery area, without a particular reason why. This is not unusual. The road to recovery is not always a straight path. Remember, this has been an emotional and physical journey. Be kind to yourself and take it easy. Know you are getting better each week. If symptoms persist or worsen, however, call the office to discuss.

Outpatient surgery:

- ✓ You **will likely** be back to your normal exercise and activities in about 3 weeks. Start slowly and see how you feel. Adjust if necessary. For example, if you lift weights, start with much lower weights than you used before surgery. Listen to your body. Be smart and don't overdo.

Main OR surgery (or surgery with a drain):

- ✓ Returning to full activity will be discussed at your post op visit. Most women are back to normal activity within 4-8 weeks, depending on the surgery.