Post-Operative Instructions
Breast Surgery

Hospital Stay

If you have a mastectomy and/or an axillary lymph node dissection, plan to stay 1 night in the hospital. For most other surgeries, including excisional biopsy, lumpectomy, segmental mastectomy and sentinel lymph node surgery, you may go home the day of surgery. A responsible adult must drive you home. If you have a tissue rearrangement, bring an overnight bag in case you are kept for observation.

Before Surgery

Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before surgery. You can shower the day before your surgery. Do not put on body lotion or deodorant after you shower. Take off nail polish and false nails before your surgery. Do not wear jewelry on the day of your surgery.

You may be scheduled for a breast localization procedure before your surgery or on the morning of your surgery. If you are scheduled for a sentinel lymph node biopsy, your breast is injected with a radiotracer the day before or the day of surgery. Your surgeon schedules this. Blue dye, for sentinel lymph node mapping, may also be injected. This is done after you are under anesthesia. This dye may cause your breast skin to stain blue for several days. Your urine may also look greenish for 24 hours.

Pre-registration and Pre-admission Testing

If you have surgery outside of MD Anderson hospital, you should get instructions for pre-registration and pre-admission testing. These instructions are given at the hospital where your surgery is scheduled. If you are not told a specific date for pre-admission testing, schedule this 5 to 14 days before your surgery date.

Medicines

Tell your surgeon, before surgery, if you take a blood thinner, including aspirin. You receive specific instructions about if and when to stop taking these medicines before surgery and when to begin taking them after surgery. Do not take Motrin®, Aleve®, and Advil® at least 5 days before your surgery. You can take Tylenol® the night before your surgery. Do not take any herbal supplements 10 days before your surgery. If you stop taking any other medicines before surgery, ask your surgeon when you can take them again.
After Surgery

Clothing
A soft cotton bra, with front closure and without underwire, is recommended. Bring it with you to the hospital. You may be given a post-operative (post-op) surgical bra as part of your surgical dressing. If so, you may replace it with your own bra after your first post-op shower. Bring a top or dress with front closure for when you leave the hospital.

Drains
Drains may be placed during surgery. A drain is removed when there is less than 30 ml total output per day for 2 days in a row. Call your clinic nurse when drains are ready to be removed.

Pain Medicine
Most patients get a prescription for pain medicine after surgery. Many pain medicines include Tylenol®. Do not take more Tylenol® while on these medicines, unless instructed by your surgeon to do so. Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medicines. Drink plenty of fluids to prevent constipation while taking pain medicine.

Diet
After surgery, you may begin to eat your normal diet as tolerated. If you have constipation, use over-the-counter stool softeners and drink more fluids. You may also use an over-the-counter suppository if needed. Tell your surgeon if you go more than 3 days without a bowel movement.

Activity
You can drive again when:
- You are no longer taking pain medicine,
- You have comfortable movement of your arms for steering and gear shifting,
- You no longer have surgical drains and
- At least 2 weeks have passed since your surgery.

Follow these activity restrictions:
- For 6 weeks after surgery, do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds.
- Do not push or pull heavy items.
- You may do light physical activity as tolerated.
- You are given instructions on how to do post-op exercises.
- Do not lift your arm above your shoulder while you have drains in place. You may resume regular physical activity after 6 weeks unless otherwise instructed by your care team.
- You may resume sexual activity whenever you are comfortable.

Tell your other care providers if you have had lymph node surgery. It is best to not have needle sticks (such as for blood draws) and blood pressure cuffs on the arm on the side of your lymph node surgery.

Physical Therapy
All patients who have lymph node surgery are referred to the rehabilitation team (physical and/or occupational therapy) after surgery. At this appointment, you are instructed on exercises to improve range of motion in the affected arm. You also get information about lymphedema (arm swelling).

Postpone this appointment if you still have drains in place. Therapists cannot work on arm range of motion until the drains are removed.

**Prosthesis**
If you have had a total mastectomy without reconstruction, ask for a prescription for a breast prosthesis at your post-operative appointment. You should wait 5 to 6 weeks after surgery or after you finish radiation treatments (if radiation is recommended) before being fitted for a prosthesis. Call the clinic nurse if you need more prosthetic prescriptions.

**Wound Care**
You can shower 48 hours after surgery. The surgical site and drains may get wet and can be gently cleaned with your regular soap. Allow any glue or tape over your incisions to fall off on its own. Do not take a bath or swim for 6 weeks, as your incision should not be submerged. You may have dissolvable sutures under your skin. Portions of the suture may be visible at either end of the incision. These fall off on their own or can be cut at your post-op visit.

Tell your surgeon if you have any of the following:
- Redness and warmth at the surgical site
- Temperature of 100.4°F or higher
- Pain that is not controlled with prescription pain medicines
- Bleeding or drainage from your surgical wound.

If you have questions, call the clinic at 713-563-9600 and ask for the nurse. If it is after hours, please ask to have your surgeon paged.