

Mastectomy

After Visit Summary

This is general information. Please see your After Visit Summary for how to take care of yourself after surgery.

Your health care team will work with you to understand any challenges you have after your hospital stay. This will help your team work toward a plan to make sure you have the right care and support to help manage your health after you leave the hospital.

Your Surgery

During a mastectomy, your surgeon will remove a breast to treat breast cancer.

Before the Surgery

- Tell your health care provider if you:
 - are pregnant
 - have a latex allergy
 - have diabetes
 - take a blood-thinner medicine.
- Remove any jewelry or piercings.

Your Incision

- Follow any directions your doctor gives you for taking care of and washing around your incision.
- Do not remove bandages or dressings.
- You may have special instructions if you have a drain.
- Strip and empty your drain 2 to 3 times a day.

What To Expect After Surgery

As you heal, you may have feelings of “pins and needles,” a cord-like tightness down the arm of you surgery side, or both. These feelings are normal and they will go away slowly.

If you had lymph nodes removed, you may have some permanent numbness.

Emotional Healing

After surgery, you may have mood swings or be more emotional than usual. This is normal.

You may find yourself feeling anger, depression, fear or anxiety. It may take longer for you to heal emotionally than physically.

Talk about your feelings with family members or friends. Talk with your doctor about joining a support group.

Pain Relief

- Take any prescription or over-the-counter medicine as directed.

Activity

- Your doctor will tell you when it is OK for you to shower, drive and have sex.
- Use normal arm movement on your surgery side to prevent stiffness. If you have a drain in place, do not lift your arm over your head until the drain is removed.

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- If your doctor wants you to do certain shoulder exercises, your nurse or doctor will show you how to do them. Start the exercises only when your doctor says it's OK.
- Your doctor will talk with you about your risk of developing lymphedema.

Lymphedema is the swelling of body tissue that can be caused by tissue damage or lymph node removal. See "How to Reduce the Risk of Lymphedema After Lymph Node Biopsy or Surgery," pt-ah-11172, to learn more about lymphedema.

- Avoid tobacco and secondhand smoke. They can slow your recovery.

Food and Beverages

- Eat well-balanced meals. Follow any instructions your doctor gave you.
- Drink more fluids.
- Avoid alcohol while you are taking prescription pain medicine.

Possible Treatment

Your doctor will talk with you about your options.

- You may meet with someone from the Radiation Oncology Department. Radiation most often happens two to four weeks after surgery. It is important that you have full arm motion before radiation begins.
- If you will receive chemotherapy as well as radiation, your oncologist may want you to have the chemotherapy done before the radiation.
- You may use a temporary prosthesis until your incision is healed (about one month). After that, you may wear a permanent prosthesis. The types, materials, textures, styles and prices of prostheses vary. Talk with your doctor for more information.

Clothing

- Your doctor will tell you before surgery if you may wear a bra right after surgery.
- You may wear a soft cotton T-shirt or camisole as soon as the bandages are removed.
- You may want to wait to buy many new bras or wear bras for at least 2 weeks. Your size, shape and incision discomfort will get better during this time.

When To Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- signs of infection: increasing redness, swelling, tenderness, warmth, change in appearance or increased drainage
- severe pain that is not relieved by medicine or rest
- a temperature of more than 101 F
- any questions or concerns.

Follow-up Appointment

Please keep all follow-up appointments with your health care provider or specialist, even if you are feeling well.