

Breast Reduction: *Recovering at home*

The first two days after surgery

- **Ask someone to drive you home after the surgery.**
It's not safe to drive yourself home.
- **Have someone stay with you for the first 24 hours** to help you and make sure you're okay.
- **Rest as much you can.** Don't lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk. Don't lift your arms above your shoulders or bend down to pick things up. Avoid pushing or pulling anything. Don't drive.
- **Do NOT smoke or drink alcohol.** Smoking is very dangerous and can cause death of the skin, nipple, or breast tissue. Avoid alcohol with any type of pain pills.
- **Don't remove your wrap or bandages until your surgeon says you can.** If your wrap feels too tight, you can loosen it a little, but it should be snug.
- **If you went home with tubes to drain fluid from your breasts, follow your surgeon's directions.** Your surgeon may want you to track the amount of fluid that drains out. Keep your appointment to have the tubes removed.
- **If you went home with surgical tape (Steri-strips™) on your incisions, don't remove the tape** unless your surgeon asks you to do so.
- **Don't shower** until your surgeon says it's okay.
- **Watch for signs of infection and call your surgeon if you notice them.** See the panel at right.
- **Follow your surgeon's directions for managing pain.** Your breasts will be sore and tender, but the amount of pain varies from person to person. To manage pain:
 - Use ice packs. Don't let an ice pack stay on for more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Don't put ice over your nipples, and don't put it on bare skin.
 - Take pain pills as directed. Do NOT mix pain pills and alcohol.
 - Realize that pain pills may make you constipated. If this happens, take an over-the-counter stool softener.
- **Rest and sleep with your upper body propped up.**
Avoid sleeping on your stomach.

The next few weeks

- **Take time off to stay home and rest for at least a week to 10 days.** Don't pick up anything heavy, lift your arms above your shoulders, bend down, or do activities where you push or pull. Avoid intense exercise.
- **Do NOT smoke.** Smoking can keep your breasts from healing and cause tissue death.
- **Do not drink alcohol.** Your surgeon will tell you when you can drink alcohol again.
- **Continue to watch for signs of infection.** See the panel below.
- **Continue to take medication as directed.** Your need for pain pills will get less until you don't need them. If your surgeon prescribed antibiotics, finish the prescription.
- **Make a post-surgery appointment, as directed by your surgeon.** At this appointment, the surgeon will give you more information on what you need to do to promote healing and reduce scars.

When should I call the surgeon?

Call your surgeon if you have any of these problems:

- A bandage or wrap that becomes too tight
- Swelling, redness, or pain that is more in one breast than the other
- Bleeding
- Drainage that smells bad from stitches or scars
- Shortness of breath (trouble breathing)
- Chills or a fever above 101° F
- Nausea and vomiting that doesn't get better

Also feel free to call if you have questions or if something just doesn't feel right.

The next few months

- **Check with your surgeon about returning to your exercise routine or other vigorous activity.** Light walking will help your recovery, as soon as you are able.
- **Expect to have some tingling or numbness in your breasts.** You may have also shooting pains in your nipples. This is normal and usually goes away after a few weeks.
- **Over time, your scars will gradually improve.** Scars are most prominent between 4 to 6 weeks. After 6 months or so, they will become lighter. Avoid tanning booths or too much sun to prevent permanent redness of your scars. Continue to do anything your surgeon recommends to help your scars heal.
- **Give yourself time to adjust to your new breast size and shape.** As with your scars, it takes about 6 months for your breasts to take on their final size and shape. It can also take you some time to adjust to your new body image. Most women are pleased with the results of breast reduction surgery. Be patient with yourself if your new shape seems unfamiliar.