

Breast Reconstruction

Free TRAM or DIEP Technique

Post operative instructions

Before your operation

- Plan to be in hospital for approximately 5-7 days following your operation. Organise for a responsible adult to accompany you home after your operation and stay with you for the full 24 hours after your surgery.
- Plan to have up to 6 weeks off work.
- Pack and bring to the hospital:
 - A loose fitting, button up shirt to get dressed into when going home, so you don't have to lift your arms above your head.
 - Your post op bra and abdominal binder

What to expect immediately after surgery

For most reconstructive surgery you will be fitted with a post operative bra and abdominal binder, you will wake up with these garments already on. Please wear them for 2 weeks, day and night.

Everyone recovers from their anaesthetic differently; but post-operative nausea is a common side effect following general anaesthesia. If you are experiencing nausea, we recommend eating lightly with small meals throughout the day. If nausea or vomiting is severe, please contact us.

You can expect slight bleeding, pain and discomfort with maximum discomfort occurring the first few days following surgery with moderate swelling and bruising of your abdomen and chest.

What to expect the first week post surgery

Pain relief: The majority of patients will experience mild to moderate pain following surgery, it is also normal to feel tightness in your abdominal muscles. If you are undergoing a bilateral reconstruction, it may be that the pain is limited to mainly one side, this should not alarm you as healing can proceed differently in each side. Pain should be manageable and will slowly ease over the course of your recovery. Your anaesthetist may provide you with pain medication, to be taken as directed.

If you have not been given a prescription, we recommend the use of Panadol or Panadol extra to manage any discomfort.

Do not take aspirin for at least 10 days following surgery as this can increase the risk of bleeding. If your pain is severe and does not subside with pain medication, please contact us.

Positioning: For the first week following your procedure you may sleep in whichever position is most comfortable, however we recommend elevation of your knees with 2 or 3 pillows, this will help reduce the tension on your abdomen and is generally a more comfortable position following your procedure.

Driving: You can drive when your wound and/or pain medication no longer impedes your functionality.

Dressings: Keep the dressings on both your chest and abdomen dry and in place until your first post operative appointment. Your incisions will seep some fluid and blood for a short time following surgery, which you can keep clean by sponging or bathing.

Swelling: Your breasts and abdomen will have a degree of swelling and bruising following the procedure, and it is normal for one side to be more swollen than the other side. This should subside within 3-4 weeks, however if a significant difference in size is noticed please contact us.

Sensation: It is typical to experience numbness, hypersensitivity or tingling in your abdomen, this is expected as nerves take time to recover; these sensations should dissipate over several months. Sensation in the reconstructed breast/s will generally be limited, however some women may have a return of some feeling.

Exercise: Walking and other forms of light exercise are an important way of promoting healing and will help to reduce swelling and chance of blood clots forming. You can move your arms, neck and torso in all directions- it won't tear anything as long as the movements are within a comfortable range for you. Be gentle lifting your arms above your head within the first two weeks; often, quick movements of the arm can result in sharp, stabbing or pulling pain. It is not unusual to walk 'bent over' for several weeks following surgery, the tension in your abdominal muscles will gradually decrease and you will be able to comfortably straighten your back.

Avoid the following:

- Lifting anything over 1kg
- Pulling or straining for at least 6 weeks.

Physiotherapy: During your hospital stay the physiotherapist will provide you with simple exercises to help prevent shoulder stiffness associated with breast reconstruction surgery. It is important to complete all exercises as instructed.

Constipation: Constipation is common following a general anaesthetic. To avoid constipation, ensure you drink plenty of fluids and foods containing fibre. If necessary, we recommend a gentle, laxative drink such as Movicol. This can be purchased from your chemist.

Recovery after the first week

Scar Management: Breast reconstruction scars will generally be slightly red for a few months and then begin to fade. On your second post-operative visit you will be advised on the most effective scar management options to ensure you have the best possible outcome.

Removal of sutures: We will normally remove sutures at your second post operative review. If absorbable sutures have been used, removal will not be necessary.

Exercise: After approximately 3 weeks you may be able to resume light exercise, strenuous lifting (e.g. children) and household duties such as cleaning. Vigorous exercise can usually be resumed after 6-8 weeks. It is important to listen to your body, if an activity is causing you discomfort, it is too soon following your procedure!

Smoking: We recommend you do not smoke for at least 3-4 weeks following your operation as smoking impedes blood flow to the skin and increases healing time.

Alcohol: Alcohol can increase post-operative bleeding and can be dangerous in combination with your pain medication. Do not drink alcohol until you have finished taking all pain medication.

Contact us if you develop:

- A fever or become unwell
- Nausea and vomiting which persists after 48 hours
- Spreading redness/rash over the operative area or suture lines
- Fluid build up in your breasts or sudden swelling in the area
- Pain which is not relieved or controlled by your pain-killers
- Have sudden copious discharge of fluid or oozing from your wounds
- For after hours emergencies or if you are unable to contact the office, visit your local GP or emergency room