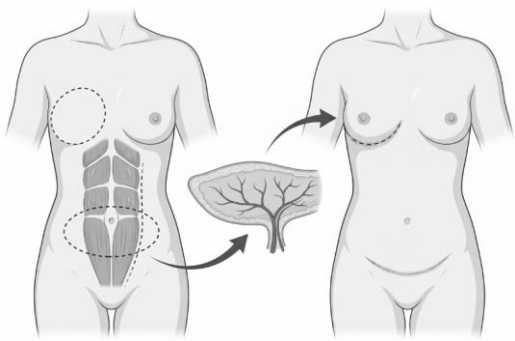
After DIEP Flap Breast Reconstruction Self-care at Home

This handout gives self-care instructions to follow at home after having DIEP (deep inferior epigastric perforate) flap breast reconstruction.



DIEP Flap Breast Reconstruction

Activity

After Surgery

For **4 weeks** after surgery:

- **Do not** lift anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.

Move your arms very gently:

- **Do not** raise your arm or arms above shoulder level to the front or the side.
- **Do not** reach behind you.
- **Do not** push or pull anything.
- **Avoid** repetitive arm movements. This includes chores like vacuuming, doing dishes and laundry.

Walking

We encourage walking because it is helpful for healing and rebuilding strength. Start with 3 to 4 walks a day for 5 to 10 minutes each. Gradually increase your distance and length of time as you heal.

Avoid aerobic exercise (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).

Driving

Do not drive until:

- It is more than 4 weeks after surgery.
- You have stopped taking prescription pain medicine.

Sleeping

When you sleep, lie on your back with your legs and back slightly raised.

Clothing

- **Do not** wear clothes that put pressure on your breasts.
- Wear tight clothes around your abdomen, such as bicycle shorts or yoga pants. This will help lower the amount of fluid your body retains.

Hygiene

- Take daily showers to reduce the risk of infection. Use mild soap and wash very gently over your incisions.
- **Do not** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until your incisions are fully healed and no scabs remain. This may take 4 to 6 weeks.

Drains

You will have 3 to 4 drains placed during surgery. Please read the handout, “Caring for Your JP Drains.”

Doppler Wires

The Doppler wires are held in place with white tape called Steri-Strips. The wires will stay in place until your provider takes them out. This is usually done during your 2-week follow-up visit.

If the wires become loose, use more surgical tape to keep them in place. You can buy this tape at most drug stores.

Pain Control
Do not use ice or heat on your surgical sites. Read the handout, "Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery," for more information about pain control.

When to Call
Call right away if:

- You experience changes to your flap (the visible part of your abdominal tissue that was surgically moved to your breast).
- Your flap skin turns dark red, purple, or black.
- Your flap skin turns pale and cold.
- You experience rapid swelling to the reconstructed breast.

Call **(608) 263-7502** for Plastic Surgery.

Do not eat or drink anything until you speak with a provider.

If you are experiencing new chest pain or shortness of breath, **call 911**.

If you are experiencing redness, swelling, pain/cramp, or warmth usually in one limb, this may be signs of a blood clot. Go to your local ER.

Call the clinic nurse if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold pressure on the site to lessen bleeding).
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C).
- Shaking and/or chills.
- Any signs of infection at your surgical site:
    - Redness
    - Increased swelling
    - Bad smelling drainage
    - Pus or cloudy colored drainage
    - Nausea and/or vomiting
    - New rash
    - Pain that worsens and is no longer eased by pain medicine.

Who to Call
Contact your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Center for Reconstructive Surgery
(608) 263-7502, option 4
Monday – Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

You may also send a message to your surgeon through EPIC MyChart. Include a photo if it helps explain your concern.

If you have urgent care needs after hours, on weekends, or holidays, please call **(608) 263-7502** and ask to speak to the plastic surgeon on call.

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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8553.