Implant-Based Reconstruction for Breast Reconstruction

This handout tells you what to expect after having breast implant surgery. Breast implants can be used for reconstruction. This may be post-mastectomy for congenital chest deformity or for gender affirming care.

During Surgery

Post-mastectomy or Congenital Breast Deformity
To reconstruct your breast(s), your surgeon may have placed a tissue expander in the breast pocket to stretch the skin. For the next step, your surgeon will remove the expander and replace it with a breast implant.

This process is also used for patients who currently have breast implants and are having an implant exchange procedure.

If you are getting an implant for reconstruction in only one of your breasts, you may choose to place an implant in your other breast to help your breasts look more even. This is called augmentation.

Gender-affirming Care
For augmentation, your surgeon will place breast implant(s) on top of or beneath your pectoralis muscle. This muscle connects the front wall of your chest with your shoulder. Your surgeon will do this surgically through a small incision in the natural crease of your chest.

Post-Surgical Garment
You will be given a surgical bra on the day of surgery. Wear the surgical bra 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 4 weeks. Only take it off to wash it or to do daily hygiene. You may purchase a front clasp sports bra (non-underwire) to wear instead. The bra needs to be snug and supportive.

Your provider may ask you to continue wearing the surgical bra for more than 4 weeks. This will be determined during your post-surgical follow-up appointment.

After Surgery

Incision Care and Healing
Remove the outermost bandage 48 hours after surgery, before you shower for the first time. This dressing is usually gauze and tape.

If your incision has strips of white tape (Steri-Strips) over it, leave the bandage on until it falls off. If it does not fall off on its own, we will remove it during your first follow-up appointment.

Hygiene
Please shower 48 hours after surgery. We recommend daily showers to reduce the risk of infection.

Use mild soap and wash your incisions very gently.

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.

Activity
- For 4 weeks, move your arms gently:
  - **Do not** raise your arm above shoulder height on your surgical side.
  - **Do not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 8 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of water). This includes children and pets.

    - **Avoid** repetitive arm movements such as chores (vacuuming, doing dishes, and laundry).
    - **Avoid** aerobic exercise (activities that cause heavy breathing or sustained elevated heart rate).
- Walking is encouraged. 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.

Work

Return to work varies from person to person and depends on the type of work you do. Please discuss what may be best for you with your surgeon.

Drains

If you had drains placed at the time of surgery, we will teach you how to care for them. Please read the handout "Caring for Your JP Drains."

Sleep Position

- Sleep on your back for 4 weeks after surgery. Sleep with your head slightly raised. After that, you may sleep on your side.
    - It may be helpful to stack pillows, use a wedge pillow, or sleep in a recliner to keep your head raised.
- **Do not** sleep on your stomach for 3 months after surgery.

Pain Control

- Each person's experience with implants is different. Some people only have mild discomfort, and others have stronger pain. It is normal to feel soreness in chest and back muscles or feel shooting pains. This will improve with time.
- Please read the handout "Pain Control After Reconstructive Surgery."
- **Do not** use ice or heat directly on your breast implants.

Special Precautions

- Please discuss surveillance for implant rupture with your surgeon. Breast MRI without contrast is recommended after 5-6 years, then every 2-3 years thereafter. Your primary care provider can order this scan.
- We will give you a copy of an implant patient decision checklist. This is an FDA requirement. It discusses the risks of implants from the manufacturer.
    - Initial and sign this document. Then return in one of the following ways:
    - Bring the document to clinic during an appointment
    - Bring on the day of surgery
    - take photos and send them to your surgeon on MyChart.
- Please read the handout "Preventing Infection After Breast Implant or Expander."

When to Call
Contact your care team immediately if you experience any of the following:

- 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
- New rash
- Pain that is worsening and is no longer eased by your pain medicine.

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. Please go to your local ER.

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 – 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.

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 © 11/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8558.