Postoperative Instructions for Mastectomy

Thank you for choosing Catholic Health as your healthcare provider. These are instructions to follow after your Mastectomy Surgery. On your first day after surgery, try to relax and use your pain medication to keep yourself comfortable. Remember to take deep breaths regularly and walk around to help prevent complications. You will be wearing a postsurgical bra or vest (for men) and below are directions to help you heal, find comfort and manage immediately postoperatively.

Pain Management

- People experience different types and amounts of pain or discomfort after surgery. The goal of pain management is to assess your own level of discomfort and to take medication as needed. You will have better results controlling your pain if you take pain medication before your pain is severe.
- Your doctor prescribed a drug for pain medication to be taken as directed on the bottle. It is recommended to take medication for pain on a regular schedule. Tylenol can be added to replace your pain medication or to be taken alternatively. Everyone is different and if one plan to decrease your pain is not working, it may be changed.
- Avoid ibuprofen and aspirin products as they may cause bleeding from your incision. Resume taking these medications after the drains are removed or as instructed by your doctor.
- Narcotics that are prescribed for pain can cause or worsen constipation so increase your fluid intake, eat high fiber foods (prunes/bran) and make sure that you are up and taking small walks.
- An icepack may be helpful to decrease discomfort and swelling. You can apply ice OVER the dressing on and ½ hour off for 6 to 8 hours following the mastectomy procedure. Do not put ice directly on the skin.

Incision, Dressing Care, Supportive Bra/Vest, Drains

Your incision, or scar, has staples or stitches and is covered by a gauze dressing and tape.

- You will be discharged from the hospital wearing a supportive garment (bra for women, vest for men) that is to be worn continuously day and night until your postoperative visit. Wearing this will help reduce swelling and will keep pressure on the surgical site.
- On the first day home from surgery, watch your dressing (and around the drains if you have them) for any increased bleeding/leaking of fluid.
- You may notice some drainage around the drain site. This is normal. Make sure the drain is functioning (not clogged) and fluid is not escaping from around the drain. The nurses will have taught you how to strip/milk the drain before you are discharged.
• Keep track of the drainage (See attached Log sheet) coming out of each drain. The initial drainage will be very red. As time passes, the color will become more straw-like. The drains are sometimes removed at your first postoperative visit with the provider in 7-10 days. You can discard the drainage in the toilet.
• Once the drains are removed and until the wound heals, you can expect some drainage to continue from the drain site. You may also notice some bruising and swelling. This too is normal. Every day will get better.
• What is not normal and you should contact your doctor’s office if:
  o Fever over 101° with chills
  o Thick mucus-like drainage from the incision, discharge or bad odor from the wound
  o EXTREME swelling, pain not relieved by medication and redness outside the dressing
  o Bright red bleeding from the incision that does not stop with pressure
  o Swelling or pain in the calves of your legs
  o Allergic reactions to any of your medications

Activity
• Avoid strenuous activity, heavy lifting and vigorous exercise. Avoid any activity that will cause even minor trauma to the surgical area, particularly arm movement on the affected side. Walking is a normal activity that can be restarted slowly.
• Avoid any direct trauma to the surgical site. For the first 1-2 weeks following your surgery, avoid lifting, pushing or pulling with the side your surgery was performed (e.g. carrying groceries, vacuuming, lifting children) until the drains are removed.
• You will be given exercises to regain movement and flexibility that are not to be started until the drains are removed. You may be referred to a physical therapist for additional rehabilitation if it is needed.
• You may resume driving when you are no longer on narcotics and the drain has been removed. Do not drive until you feel safe turning the wheel and stopping quickly.
• You may be able to return to work within 3-8 weeks. Return to work varies with your type of work, your overall health and personal preferences.

Diet/Medications
• You have no restrictions on your diet and may resume your regular healthy diet immediately. If you feel nausea from the anesthesia or are vomiting, this will pass. Drink clear liquids or a Popsicle until you are feeling better.
• You can resume all of your regular medications except blood thinners unless otherwise instructed.