

Breast Surgery

Your recovery at home

Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre
Surgical and Breast Health Centre Programs
32900 Marshall Road
Abbotsford, BC

This booklet belongs to: _____

We also give you '**Preparing for Your Surgery**' booklet.

Read both booklets carefully.

Bring both booklets to every hospital visit before your surgery.

Your recovery at home

Going home



How long you stay in the hospital depends on:

- your health before the surgery
- the type of surgery
- how you recover from the surgery

Most people can go home the day of surgery or the following day. You receive medicine to either help you sleep through your surgery (general anaesthetic) or relax during the surgery (sedation).

If you have day surgery, you must have a responsible adult for these 2 things:

- driving you home
- staying with you for the first 24 hours after surgery

Also, for the first 24 hours after surgery:

- **Do not** drive or operate hazardous machinery.
- **Do not** drink alcohol or use any substance or street drug.
- **Do not** make important decisions or sign legal documents.

Going home checklist

You are ready to go home when:

- You are drinking well.
- Your pain is well controlled with pills.
- You know what medications (including new ones) you are taking, how and when to take them, and why you need them.
- You have prescription(s) for your medications, if needed.
- You know who to call if you need help (see page 9).
- You have a ride home from the hospital.
- You have someone to stay with you for the first 24 hours, at least.

Caring for Yourself at Home

Managing pain

If you have been living with pain before surgery, tell your surgeon how you manage this pain, such as with medicines, herbs, supplements, cannabis products, other substances, massage, yoga, meditation, etc. This helps your surgeon create the best plan with you for managing pain after surgery.

Your breast(s) will be sore for the next few days. This should steadily improve but might last for a few days to a couple of weeks.

How much pain you have and how much pain medicine you need depends on the type of surgery you have, and if you were using anything for pain before surgery.

Your pain should be at a comfortable level that allows you to move, take deep breaths, cough, and do every day activities.

To help ease the pain:

- Wear a supportive bra (such as a sports bra) at all times for the next 1 to 2 days.
- If you have lymph node surgery, use the support pillow as directed by the breast health nurse.
- Put an ice pack into a pillowcase. Then place this wrapped ice pack over the incision for 10 to 15 minutes, every 2 to 3 hours.

Never put an ice pack directly on your skin.

When you are ready to go home, your surgeon gives you instructions to take pain medicine. This might include a prescription for an opioid (narcotic).

For the first few days:

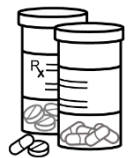
- If your pain is at an uncomfortable level, take your pain medicine as directed.
- As your pain improves, take your pain medicine less often and/or a smaller amount until you have little or no pain, then stop.
- At first, you might have to take a prescription medication. After a short time and as your pain improves, a non-prescription pain medicine should be enough to manage your pain.

Always read the label and/or information from the pharmacist for how to take medication safely.

Remember

You can do other things to help ease your pain or distract you from the pain:

- ✓ Slow breathing
- ✓ Listen to music
- ✓ Watch T.V.



Questions about medicines?

Call your local pharmacy and ask to speak to the pharmacist.

For help after hours, call 8-1-1.

Ask to speak to a pharmacist.

Family Practitioner:

Refers to either a family doctor or nurse practitioner

Non-prescription pain medicines (also called 'over-the-counter' medicines) – You buy them at the pharmacy without a prescription. You might only need to take this type of medicine if you do not have much pain after surgery.

Examples of non-prescription medicines (and brand names):

- acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- acetylsalicylic acid or ASA (Aspirin®)
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Examples: ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) ★
naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve®) ★

★ **Note:** **NSAIDs are not for everyone after surgery.** If you have (or have had) health problems such as stomach ulcers, kidney disease, or a heart condition, check with your surgeon or family practitioner before using NSAIDs.

Opioid (narcotic) pain medicines – You might get a small number of pills for severe pain. They are only meant to be taken for a short time. Take only as much as you need to allow you to do daily activities.

Examples of opioid pain medicines:

- Tramacet® (tramadol and acetaminophen) ★
- Tylenol #3® (codeine and acetaminophen) ★
- Oxycocet® / Percocet® (oxycodone and acetaminophen) ★
- tramadol, hydromorphone, morphine, oxycodone

★ **Note:** These medications also have 300 to 325mg acetaminophen in each tablet. All total, **do not** take more than 4000mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours (too much can harm your liver).

When taking non-prescription pain medicines as well, most people need to take a lower amount of the opioid or take the opioid less often.

Safe use of opioid pain medicines

If you are using any medicines with opioids (narcotics) in them, we want you to do so safely. However, serious problems can happen. Take note of the following safety information.

Before taking opioids:

- Tell your surgeon if you have sleep apnea. Opioids can make your sleep apnea worse.

Safely storing opioids:

- Store opioid medicines in a secure place.
- Keep out of sight and out of reach of children, teens, and pets.
- Never share your opioid medicine with anyone else.

Safely disposing of unused opioids:

- Take any unused opioid medicines back to your pharmacy to be safely disposed. **Do not** keep unused medicines at home.

Safely taking opioids:

- Your pain should lessen over the first week. You should not need to take opioid pain medicine for more than 1 week.
- Always use the least amount possible for the shortest amount of time.
- Common side effects include constipation, feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), a dry mouth, sweating, dizziness, and feeling drowsy.
- **Do not** crush, cut, break, chew, or dissolve opioids before taking. Doing this could cause serious harm, even death.
- While taking opioid pain medicines: **Do not** drive or drink alcohol. **Do not** take any sleeping pills unless your doctor has said you can.

Need help with food choices?
Call 8-1-1.
Ask to speak to a dietitian.

Drinking and eating

Return to your normal diet when you get home. To heal, your body needs extra calories and nutrients, especially protein.

To get the nutrients you need, eat foods high in protein such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, nut butters (such as peanut butter), tofu, or legumes.

Managing Nausea

If you feel sick to your stomach (nauseated), try any of the following:

- Place a cool, damp cloth on your face or the back of your neck.
- Take small sips of ginger ale.
- Suck on pieces of ice.

If you still feel sick to your stomach, swallow medicine for nausea in pill form. If you cannot swallow a pill or are throwing up (vomiting), take medicine for nausea that should only go in your bum (called a rectal suppository). Talk to a pharmacist if you have questions.

Keeping your bowels regular

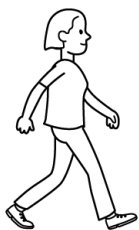
Constipation can happen because you are taking opioid pain medication, are less active, or eating less fibre.

To prevent constipation:

- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquid each day (unless you have been told something different because of a medical condition).
- Eat high fibre foods such as bran, prunes, whole grains, vegetables, and fruit.
- Walk and move around as much as you can.

If you continue to be constipated, talk with a pharmacist or family practitioner about taking a laxative.





Being active

Activity and exercise help build and maintain your muscle strength, give you more energy, and help with recovery. You need to find a balance between rest and activity. Pace yourself for the first few weeks.

Slowly increase how much you do each day (your activity level). Increase the distance and time you walk. Only increase your activity level as much as you comfortably can.

If you are still having pain, exercise 30 minutes after you have taken your pain medication.

It is normal to have some stiffness in your back, shoulders, and arms after breast surgery:

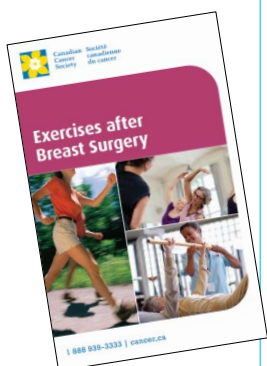
- Use your arms and shoulders to eat, bathe, and dress. It can be painful at first, but will get less painful over time.
- Do the exercises in the booklet '[Exercises after Breast Surgery](#)' from the Canadian Cancer Society, or as directed by the physiotherapist or breast health nurse.
- If you have surgery on your lymph nodes (under your arm), you need to do range of movement exercises to help your recovery. It might take several days and sometimes 2 or 3 weeks before you can complete the exercises.

Do not lift anything over 4 to 5 kilograms (10 pounds) until you check with your surgeon at your appointment after surgery.

You can return to **sexual activity** when you feel ready.

Usually, you can return to **driving** when you can shoulder check and comfortably wear your seatbelt. If you are not sure about it, ask at your follow-up appointment.

Remember: Do not drive when you are taking opioid pain medication.



A 4 litre milk jug weighs 4 kg (9 pounds)



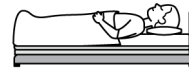
Getting Rest

In the first few weeks, it is very common to feel tired and have low energy. Rest and sleep help you heal.

Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep each night.

Take rest breaks and naps during the day, as needed.

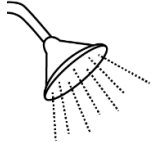
If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your family practitioner.



Managing Moods and Emotions

After major surgery, it is common to have a low mood or changeable mood at times. If you find your mood is staying low or is getting worse, contact your family practitioner.

Caring for your incision



Always wash your hands before and after touching around your incision site(s). Bruising around your incision is normal. It should go away in 1 to 2 weeks.

When you have a bandage, only take sponge baths. If you sit in the bathtub, keep the level of the water lower than your belly button. Keep the bandage and surgical drain(s) clean and dry.

When your bandage comes off depends on the type of surgery you have. You can shower when you no longer have a bandage.

For at least the next 2 weeks or until the incision is healed and the drains are removed:

- ✗ No soaking in a bath tub or hot tub.
- ✗ No swimming.
- ✗ No creams, lotions, or ointments on your incision, unless directed by your surgeon.
- ✗ No deodorant, talcum powder, or shaving under your arm (until the incision is healed). Use an electric shaver rather than a razor with a blade.

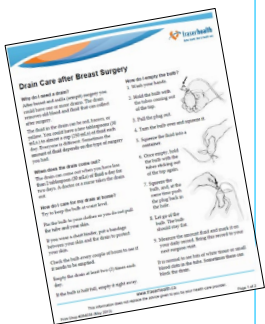
Doing any of these things could delay healing.

If you have drains

Follow the instructions on the sheet '[Drain Care after Breast Surgery](#)' and the instructions from the Breast Health nurse.

If you need a drain, you meet with the Breast Health nurse before surgery. Call the Breast Health Centre to speak with a nurse, if you have any questions or concerns, 604-851-4806.

Not all breast surgeries will need drains. Surgeries that need drains include some mastectomies, some lymph node surgeries (such as axillary node dissections), and most reconstructive surgeries.



If you have a lumpectomy

- Leave the bandage on your incision for 2 days
- Remove your bandage on the 3rd day.
- Leave the white skin tapes (steri-strips) on your incision (if you have them), until they fall off on their own. If the tapes are still on your incision(s) after 2 weeks, you can peel them off. They are easier to peel off after taking a shower.
- Do not remove the stitches used to close the incision. They dissolve on their own.

If you have a mastectomy

- Do not touch your bandages and your binder (if you have one).
- The nurse sees you at the Breast Health Centre 2 to 4 days after surgery. At this appointment, the nurse changes your bandage (and maybe your binder) for the first time, and checks your drains.

If you have reconstructive surgery

- The Breast Health Centre and your plastic surgeon give you more instructions.

If you have a sentinel lymph node biopsy

- Your urine (pee) and stool (poop) are blue or green for a couple of days after surgery. This is normal.
- Your breast skin where the dye was injected might be blue. This blue colour can last a few months. This is normal.
- Your overall skin tone might look different for up to 24 hours.
- **Do not leave Canada for 48 hours after your surgery.** You cannot cross international borders because of the radioactive tracer used during your surgery.



Getting help

When to get help:

Get help for any of the following:

- You have a fever over 38°C (101°F).
 - Your incision is warm, red, swollen, or has blood or pus (yellow/green fluid) draining from it.
 - Your breast(s) become very swollen.
 - Your pain does not ease with pain medicine, or stops you from moving and recovering.
 - You have swelling of the arm or hand that gets worse or does not go away.
 - You have redness, tenderness, or pain in your calf or lower leg.
 - You are throwing up often.
 - You have diarrhea that is severe or continues for more than 2 days.
 - You feel increasingly tired or dizzy.
 - You have a drain and have concerns.
- If you notice bleeding from the incision:
 - Press firmly over the area for 5 to 10 minutes.
 - If the bleeding does not stop, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Who can help?

- Call the Breast Health Centre, **604-851-4806**.
Monday to Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- After Breast Health Centre hours and on weekends, see your family practitioner or go to a walk-in clinic.
- If you cannot contact the Breast Health Centre or a family practitioner, and have any questions about your recovery:
 - ▶ Call Fraser Health Virtual Care, **1-800-314-0999**, or chat live online at fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare, 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily
 - ▶ Call **8-1-1** (HealthLinkBC.ca) to speak to a registered nurse any time, day or night.

- Call **9-1-1** if you have any of the following:
 - ▶ trouble breathing or shortness of breath
 - ▶ chest pain
 - ▶ sudden, severe pain

9-1-1



HealthLinkBC is available in 130 languages.

For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

Questions you might have:

Examples: 'When will I be able to return to my regular activities?' 'When can I go back to work?' 'When can I return to my sports?'

Appointments after surgery

You visit the Breast Health Centre before your surgery.
We book your follow-up appointments at that time.

I have an appointment with: _____
(Breast Health Centre or
family practitioner)

My appointment is on: _____

I have an appointment with: _____
(Breast Health Centre or
family practitioner)

My appointment is on: _____

If you are not sure when your appointments are booked,
call the Breast Health Centre at 604-851-4806.

www.fraserhealth.ca

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

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To order, visit patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca

