

Drain Care after Breast Surgery

Why do I need a drain?

After breast and axilla (armpit) surgery you could have one or more drains. The drain removes old blood and fluid that can collect after surgery.

The fluid in the drain can be red, brown, or yellow. You could have a few tablespoons (30 mLs.) to almost a cup (250 mLs) of fluid each day. Everyone is different. Sometimes the amount of fluid depends on the type of surgery you had.

When does the drain come out?

The drain can come out when you have less than 2 tablespoons of fluid (less than 30 mLs) in 24 hours for 2 days in a row.

A doctor or a nurse takes the drain out.

How do I care for my drain at home?

Try to keep the bulb at waist level.

Pin the bulb to your clothes so you do not pull the tube and your skin.

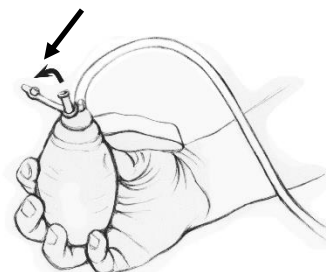
If you wear a chest binder, put a bandage between your skin and the drain to protect your skin.

Check the bulb every couple of hours to see if it needs to be emptied.

Empty the drain at least 2 times each day.
 If the bulb is half full, empty it right away.

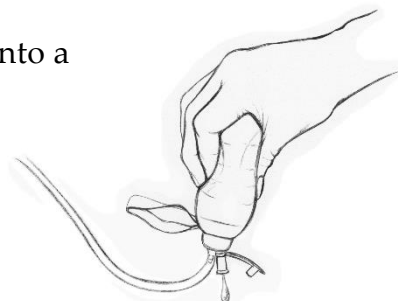
How do I empty the bulb?

1. Wash your hands.
2. Hold the bulb with the tubes coming out of the top.



3. Pull the plug out.
4. Turn the bulb over and squeeze it.

5. Squeeze the fluid into a container.



6. Once empty, hold the bulb with the tubes sticking out of the top again.

7. Squeeze the bulb, and, at the same time push the plug back in the hole.



8. Let go of the bulb. The bulb should stay flat.
9. Measure the amount fluid and mark it on your daily record. Bring this record to your next surgeon visit.

It is normal to see bits of white tissue or small blood clots in the tube. Sometimes these can block the drain.

Drain Care after Breast Surgery- *continued*

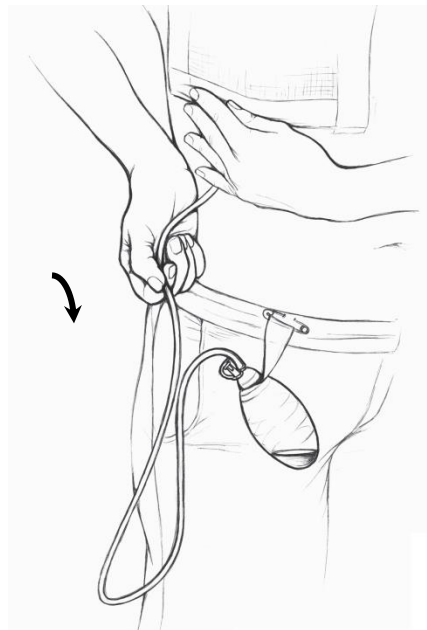
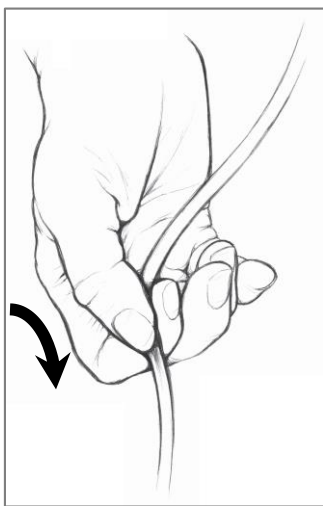
How do I know if my drain is not working?

The drain is probably not working if you notice any of the following:

- Suddenly there is no drainage.
- Fluid leaks out where the tube enters your breast or armpit.
- Your breast or armpit is swollen.

What can I do to fix it?

1. With one hand, hold the drain where it enters your body (breast or armpit).
2. With the other hand, squeeze or pinch the tubing between your thumb and finger.
3. Move your fingers towards the bulb.
4. Repeat this action several times.



When do I call the doctor or nurse?

Call if any of these things happen:

- There is no drainage after you have squeezed the tubing several times.
- The bulb will not stay flat.

The drainage is bright red blood.

Illustrations courtesy of Multi-Media Services, BC Cancer Agency, 2007