

Mastectomy and Reconstruction Checklist



FRIEDMAN CENTER
FOR BREAST AND LYMPHATIC SURGERY

Hospital Essentials

Hospitals are notorious for being noisy and disruptive. That said, it's important to rest and get as much sleep as you can, as this will help your body heal.

Use soft music, earplugs, or a sound machine to tune out noise and create a peaceful environment. Having a private room post-surgery can also make a big difference. Some hospitals offer this as standard practice for breast cancer patients. Check with your health care team and your insurance company to see what kind of coverage they offer

- Plastic sippy cup/spill-free sports bottle**—one with a straw is even better
- Hand sanitizer**—keep a travel-size bottle nearby
- Throat lozenges or hard candy**—your throat is usually sore after surgery
- Lip balm and hand lotion**—your mouth can get dry and chapped from anesthesia, and hospitals are also generally dry
- Face wipes and feminine or baby wipes**—your showers will be limited right after surgery
- Hair bands and dry shampoo**—if desired
- Headphones and music**—to drown out hospital background noise
- A good book or reading material**—whatever relaxes you
- Phone and charging cord**—get an extra-long cable so you can use the phone in bed
- Sleep mask**—to block out bright hospital lighting; can also be used at home if you're sleeping in a common room
- Small notebook**—to jot down medical notes and instructions
- Button down shirt**—to wear home from the hospital; your arm mobility will be limited at first
- Pajama, yoga, or lounge pants**—something comfortable to wear home from the hospital
- Slip-on shoes**—wear them to the hospital; they can double as slippers
- Sized-up underwear**—buy one size larger than usual to avoid your scar and give you some extra room for possible swelling (if having DIEP Flap Reconstruction)
- Small pillows for the ride home**—prop and support yourself to be as comfortable as possible
- Insurance card, medication list, and physician contact information**
- Something from home that makes you feel normal**—face moisturizer, lipstick, earrings...whatever works for you!
- Electric toothbrush**—if you have one, it's easier to use after surgery than a manual toothbrush
- Back scratcher**—it will be difficult to move your arms if you get an itch

Home Essentials

Everything on the hospital essentials list!

- Reclining chair**—not required, but helpful for staying comfortable during the day and initially at night, since it can be difficult to lie completely flat for a while; place a small table next to the chair to keep essentials nearby
- Extra pillows**—whenever you transition to sleeping in your bed, use extra pillows in all different sizes to prop yourself up; a small stepstool may help you get in and out of bed; insurance may cover a hospital bed rental
- Medication list**—keep this handy so your caretaker can administer and track your medication
- Groceries**—have comfort foods that appeal to you available; eat saltines or something with ginger with pain meds to prevent nausea or dizziness
- Stool softener**—anesthesia can cause constipation; take with plenty of water
- Pain relievers**—over the counter products like Tylenol, Advil/Motrin, or even baby aspirin; ask what your doctor recommends
- Antibacterial soap/antimicrobial cleanser**—Dial soap, Hibiclens skin cleanser, etc.
- Antibiotic ointment for wounds**—something like bacitracin or Neosporin; ask what your doctor recommends
- Alcohol prep pads, sterile gauze, and 3M paper tape**—for drain and wound care; the hospital may provide some of these materials
- Powder-free surgical gloves**—for drain and wound care; pick up a box at any local pharmacy; do not use if you have a latex allergy
- Large safety pins**—to attach drains
- Detachable shower head**—makes post-op showers significantly easier
- Post-surgical bra**—if you have implant reconstruction, you usually leave the hospital in a special post-surgical bra; you can use this bra for a few weeks or even months
- Sleep or sports bra**—if you have flap reconstruction, your doctor may not advise wearing a bra or restrictive clothing for a few weeks; once you can wear a bra, a soft and lightweight sleep or sports bra; front-hook closures are ideal so you don't have to pull it over your head; you can order the bra in multiple sizes to have options as bandages come off and swelling goes down; camisoles with built-in shelf bras also offer light support
- Button down shirts**—buy them oversized for comfort, as you will have some swelling at first; it will be difficult to pull a shirt over your head for the first few weeks.
- Pajama, yoga, or lounge pants**—something comfortable with plenty of room, especially if you are having flap reconstruction

Tips

It's important to take good care of yourself before surgery so that you are going in as strong as possible. Before and after surgery, drink lots of fluids, walk, eat healthy, and rest well!

ACTIVITY

Exercise during recovery with a simple walk around the hospital floor or your house. Short walks a few times a day will help you heal and recover.

REST

Nap during the day as often as you can.

Sleep in a chair or propped on your back with lots of pillows. If you are a side or stomach sleeper, practice sleeping on your back before surgery!

Ask for a sleep aid if you have difficulty falling or staying asleep.

SELF-CARE

Make sure you are happy in your surroundings. Use a candle or diffuser with a scent you love to improve your mood and lift your spirits.

Mental relaxation helps the body heal. Read a book, meditate, listen to soothing music, or do whatever helps you reduce stress and feel peaceful throughout the day.

HEALTH

Keep a sippy cup of water next to you and drink continuously to flush out your system.

Keep a bar of antibacterial soap just for yourself while your wounds are exposed.

Check with your doctor about vitamins, minerals, and supplements that can build your immune system and lower an inflammatory response.

SUPPORT

If possible, have a caretaker for the first week after surgery. You will need extra rest and might feel fuzzy from pain meds. A caretaker can administer your medication, run errands, and help with tasks around the house.

Accept help, even if it doesn't come naturally to you. Let your neighbors, friends, and family pitch in.

LOGISTICS

Have everything at home put down at counter level- you won't be able to reach much above shoulder height for the first couple of weeks.

Be careful when using heating pads, ice-packs, ovens, etc. You may not feel your skin and could burn yourself. If taking a hot shower, stand with your back to the water.

Finally, it's worth saying that this is major surgery.

You may not feel the impact of it all until sometime after it's over.

Remember that physical healing takes time. Emotional healing may take even longer.

So be kind, patient, and gentle with yourself. You deserve nothing less, especially now.