

Care after Breast Surgery

Wound Care

What is a wound?

It is any damage which causes your skin to break. You might develop non-healing wounds if you had breast surgery, radiation therapy or have a weak immunity. Wound infections can then develop in such cases.



What are some common breast surgery?

1. Wide Local Excision/Lumpectomy: A surgery to remove cancer or other abnormal tissue from the breast and some normal tissue around it, but not the breast itself.
2. Mastectomy: A surgery to remove your breast (single or both). This helps to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer or to treat it. You will usually have one wound on your chest wall and at least a drain to bring home after surgery.
3. Breast Reconstruction: A surgery to help restore your breast shape. This can be done together with mastectomy. You can expect a longer hospitalization after surgery.



What to expect after a breast surgery?

- Steri-strips (paper tapes) and a waterproof dressing will be applied to your wound.
- Keep your wound dressing clean and dry.
- You will have an appointment with our Breast Nurse Specialist (BNS) arranged within seven to ten days upon discharge. Your wound dressing will be reviewed during your appointment.
- If you undergo mastectomy, your doctor will provide a chest binder. This binder will be wrapped firmly around your chest immediately after surgery.

Common Post Surgery Complications

- Pain
- Bruising
- Wound swelling
- Drain leakage or blockage
- Seroma (buildup of fluid)
- Altered sensation and numbness



Factors Affecting Wound Healing

- Age
- Pre-existing medical conditions
- Immune status
- Nutritional status
- Lifestyles (eg. Inactive, smoking etc.)
- Skin conditions
- Medications (eg. Steroids, blood thinning, etc.)
- Infections



Sign & Symptoms of Wound Infection

- Fever
- Redness of skin around the wound and warm to touch
- Increased swelling, tenderness or pain around the wound
- Yellow or greenish colour pus
- Cloudy wound drainage or discharge



Looking after your wound

- Do not wet your wound dressing.
- Keep your wound dressing clean and dry.
- Do not use body lotions on your wound unless directed by your doctor.
- Do not use hot or cold packs as you may have reduced sensation around the surgical region area.
- Perform exercises in appropriate frequency and intensity only as prescribed.
- Do not lift any weight heavier than 2kg



Surgical Bra

Why do I need a surgical bra after my breast surgery?

Seroma accumulation (Serous fluid accumulation) is common problem after breast surgery.

Wearing a surgical bra helps to reduce seroma accumulation. It also helps to decrease pain and discomfort.



Care and Management

- You will need to wear the surgical bra for at least 3-4 weeks after surgery.
- You need to wear it the whole day (even when you are sleeping or resting).
- You are allowed to removed it during sponging.
- You nurse will teach you how to pad and bind it on your chest area.
- The surgical bra as to be firm enough to prevent seroma accumulation and pain.

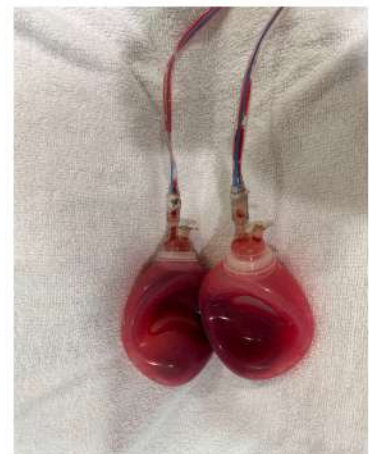
Care of Blake Drain

What is a Blake Drain?

It is a round, flexible system that can be carried around. It is used for closed wound drainage.

A blake drain is used to drain blood and other fluids from your wound post-surgery. This helps to prevent infection and speed up wound healing.

It is inserted by your surgeon during surgery. You can have one to four drains depending on the type of surgery performed.



How does a Blake Drain work?

It uses a vacuum system to draw fluids from your operation site into a reservoir bulb. You need to always maintain the vacuum of the bulb in order to facilitate drainage and prevent blockage.

You will be given a Wound Drainage Record Chart upon discharge. Record your drainage amount in this chart when your drainage bottle is half to three quarter full or there is no vacuum in the bottle.

How long do I need a Blake Drain for?

Your drain usually last between two to three weeks. But it may last longer depending on your drainage amount.












When should I empty my Blake Drain?

You should empty your drain at least three times a day.

In the morning, in the afternoon and before you go to bed or whenever it is half full.

You should also empty the drain when there is no vacuum in the bottle. (When the bottle is bulged up)

Steps to Empty Your Blake Drain(s)

<p>1. Wash your hands with soap and water</p>	
<p>2. Prepare 70% alcohol swabs, a measuring cup and your Wound Drainage Record Chart.</p>	
<p>3. Holding the tubing together with the bottle and flip open the plug from the bulb.</p>	
<p>4. Once the bulb is inflated, turn your bottle upside down over the measuring cup.</p>	
<p>5. Squeeze the drainage bulb gently and empty the content into the measuring cup</p>	
<p>6. Once empty, fold the bulb into half and squeeze all the air out.</p>	
<p>7. Clean the emptying port with alcohol swabs. Close the cap.</p>	
<p>8. Secure the cap with a tape. Do not dangle the drain and carefully put it back into your pocket.</p>	
<p>9. Record the date, time, amount and colour of the fluid in your chart.</p>	
<p>10. Flush the fluid into the toilet bowl. Rinse the measuring cup</p>	
<p>11. Wash your hands with soap and water.</p>	

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why does my Surgical Bra have to be firmly wrapped around me at all time?

Your Surgical Bra helps to reduce fluid buildup at the surgical site. It also holds the wound firmly in place.

Can I bathe?

We do not recommend bathing in the first two weeks post-surgery. Your Breast Nurse Specialist will review your wound and advice accordingly.

Why are there bruises surrounding my wound? Is it normal?

Bruising post-surgery is normal as surgery causes tiny blood vessels (capillaries) to burst. Bruises generally last three to six days, but they may last as long as three week. Do not rub the area or apply any ointment unless instructed by your surgeon.

What if my drainage tubing slips out?

1. Do not panic
2. Do not attempt to push the tube back into your body.
3. Keep the tubing and bottle into a big plastic bag.
4. Clean the drain site with alcohol swabs and cover with a gauze and secure it with the adhesive film provided during discharge.
5. Change the gauze whenever it gets soaked with discharges.
6. Contact WH Contact Center during operating hours.

What do I do if the drainage is not flowing?

1. Ensure your drain is flattened and is capped well.
2. Please milk the tubing.
3. Contact WH Contact Center during operating hours if there is still no drainage after 2 hours.

WH Contact Centre: 6363 3000 Monday to Sunday: 8am-11pm

To proceed to Emergency Department for urgent situation

Eg. Bleeding (sudden increase in drainage of fresh blood, shortness of breathe, chest pain etc.

Exercises After Breast Surgery

Importance of mobility and exercises:

Pain associated with surgery to your breast and axilla affects your rib cage and shoulder mobility. This may affect the amount of air going in and out of your lungs. Reduced rib cage mobility may also lead to lung complications such as retention of secretions in the lung, pneumonia, part of lung collapse, reduced circulation, and swelling. Primary goal for yourself and your medical team is to prevent these immediate post-surgery complications.

Thus, it is important for you to start some simple exercises for your lungs and arms within your pain limits.

Doing simple exercises after breast surgery may help to:

- Improve lung functions
- Reduce swelling, promote tissue healing
- Stabilise your blood pressure
- Prevent clots in your leg veins
- Reduce chest and shoulder tightness
- Achieve full shoulder range of movement
- Prevent frozen shoulder
- Prevent lymphoedema
- Improve posture and restore overall physical mobility

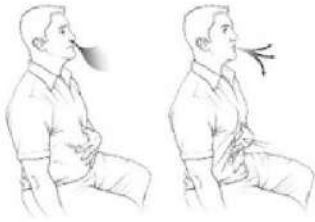


What can you do on the day of surgery?

If you are awake and feel rested, you can start doing the following simple exercises, while you are still resting on bed.

1. Deep Breathing Exercises

Deep breathing can help you relax and ease your pain and discomfort around the incision. This can also relieve stress.



1. Lie down on your back comfortably, with elevated head end of the bed to approximately 40 degrees or to your comfortable level.
2. Have your feet slightly apart.
3. Take a slow deep breath through your nose. Let your chest and tummy expand.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth.

2. Heel Slides

This exercise will help to improve circulation in the legs and prevent clots in the leg veins.



1. Lie down on your back comfortably, with elevated head end of the bed to approximately 40 degrees or to your comfortable level.
2. Your feet slightly apart.
3. Slide your right heel towards your buttocks, hold for a count of 5.
4. Slide your heel back to the starting position.
5. Do the same with left heel.
6. Alternate between right heel and left heel for ____ repetitions each.
7. You can repeat this exercise 3-4 times in a day.

3. Ankle Pumps

This exercise helps to pump blood in the legs and prevents blood clots.



1. Lie down on your back comfortably, with elevated head end of the bed to approximately 40 degrees or to your comfortable level.
2. Have your feet slightly apart.
3. Start with your right toes pointing to the sky/ceiling.
4. Push your toes down towards the surface of bed and hold for a count of 5.
5. Return your toes back to the starting position as the toes are pointing to the sky.
6. Do the same with your left toes.
7. Alternate between right toes and left toes for ____ repetitions each.
8. You can repeat this exercise 3-4 times in a day.

Day 1 post surgery to 1st week after surgery

Exercises and moving out of bed will usually be allowed after the surgery. In some special circumstances, your surgeon-in-charge may ask you to rest on bed for up to 48 hours after surgery. On the first day after surgery, your physiotherapist and or nurse will assist you to move out of bed and walk once you are deemed fit to do so. Your physiotherapist may start teaching you the exercises that you can do on the bed or while seated on a chair. It is also important to start moving out of bed and walking as soon as you are able, to prevent complications such as chest infections and blood clots from forming in the veins of your legs.

Precautions to take

Your affected side is the side where you had your surgery. You may need to limit your range of movement of your affected shoulder and upper arm to allow healing of the incision. This is called range of motion restriction. Your surgeon and or physiotherapist will tell you about your range of motion restriction. They will also explain to you up to what extent you can move your shoulder or upper arm.

You can write down it here to remember.

Your range of motion restriction is _____ degrees.

You should try to use your arm for normal everyday activities (e.g. eating, drinking, brushing your teeth, picking up light objects), within limits of discomfort. A gentle stretching feeling is fine, stop if you feel any pain.



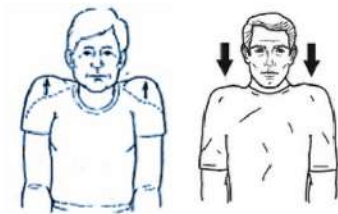
Arm and Shoulder Exercises

Doing arm and shoulder exercises will help you to get back your full range of movement of your shoulder. You are allowed to move within a pain free range, as you slowly gain back your full range.

You may wish to take your pain relief medication prior to exercise. Mild and gentle stretching discomfort are expected during exercise. You can stop your exercise if you feel any increase in pain and consult your doctor / therapist for further advise. Your therapist also may advise if you can do some or all the following exercises.

1. Shoulder shrugs:

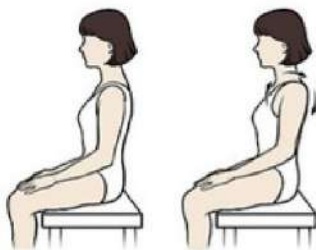
This exercise helps to mobilise your front of your chest and shoulder muscles.



1. Sit or stand comfortably with your arms relaxed at your side.
2. Raise your shoulders as if you are trying to touch your ears with your shoulders, while breathing in.
3. Lower down to starting position as you breath out.
4. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

2. Shoulder rolls:

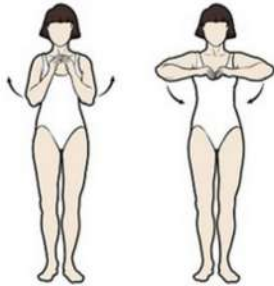
This exercise gently stretches your chest and shoulder muscles.



1. Sit or stand comfortably with your arms relaxed at your side.
2. In a circular motion, bring your shoulders forward, up, backward, and down. Start with smaller circles and try to make the circle as big as you are comfortable. Move both shoulders at the same time.
3. Breath in while your shoulders are moving forward and up,
4. Lower down to starting position as you breath out.
5. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

3. Shoulder wings:

This exercise helps to get back outward movement of your shoulder



1. Sit or stand comfortably with your arms on your chest or collar bone.
2. Raise your elbows out to the side. Remember not to raise them higher than your range of motion restriction. If you do not have a range of motion restriction, raise them as high as you can, up to shoulder level.
3. Breathe in while your elbows are raising up.
4. Lower down to starting position as you breathe out.
5. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, _____ times per day.

4. Backward arm circles:

This exercise helps to loosen up your shoulder joint and gently mobilises your chest wall. If you had surgery on both breasts, do this exercise with one arm at a time.



1. Stand comfortably with your feet slightly apart for balance. arms on your chest or collar bone.
2. Raise your affected arm to the side. Remember not to raise the arm higher than your allowed range of motion restriction. If you do not have a range of motion restriction, raise them as high as you can without feeling discomfort.
3. Make a slow backward circle in the air with your arm, keeping your elbow straight.
4. Breathe in while your arm raising up, in the circle.
5. Breathe out while your arm is lowered down.
6. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, _____ times per day.

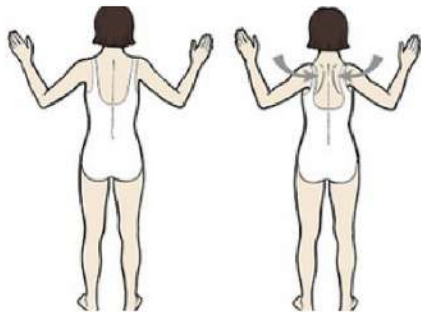
5. Forward arm circles:

Follow the same instructions as for backward arm circles, but make slow forward circles.

Make sure to rest your arm for a moment between doing backward and forward arm circles.

6. W Exercise:

This exercise helps to stretch your chest wall muscles.



1. Sit or stand comfortably with your arms out to the side and palms facing forward (see the figure 8).
2. Try to bring your palms up to same level as your face or to the highest comfortable position. Remember not to raise them higher than your range of motion restriction.
3. Pinch your shoulder blades together, as if you are squeezing a pencil between them and relax to starting position.
4. Breathe in while you are pinching the shoulder blades,
5. Breathe out while you are returning to the starting position.
6. Do this exercise for ____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

7. Back climb:

This exercise helps you to improve your shoulder joint rotation and helps you reach your back.

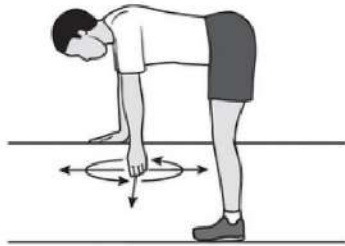


1. Sit or stand comfortably. Place your hands behind your back.
2. Hold your affected hand with your other hand. If you had surgery on both sides, use the arm that moves most easily to hold the one doesn't move so easily.
3. Slowly slide your hands up the centre of your back as far as you can.
4. You may feel a gentle stretch in your shoulder area with this movement.
5. Breath in while you are sliding up,
6. Breath out while you are sliding down and returning to the starting position.
7. If you feel tightness is lesser, you may slide your hands up a little higher.
8. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

8. Shoulder Pendulum

Exercise:

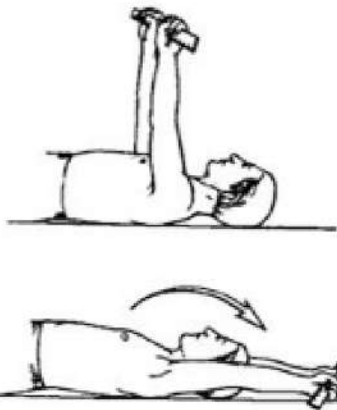
This exercise will help you to loosen up your shoulder joint and muscle around the joint with less pain.



1. Stand leaning on a table with your unaffected hand. Lean forward until your trunk is horizontal to the floor.
2. Relax your affected arm. Swing your arm as if you are drawing a circle on the floor in a clockwise direction for up to 10 repetitions.
3. Change the direction and swing your arm in an anti-clockwise direction for another 10 repetitions.
4. Breathe in while you are swinging through half of the circle.
5. Breathe out while you are returning to the starting position.
6. Do this exercise for ____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

9. Wand Exercise:

This exercise help you improve your shoulder range of motion.



Try to do this exercise while you are lying on your back comfortably.

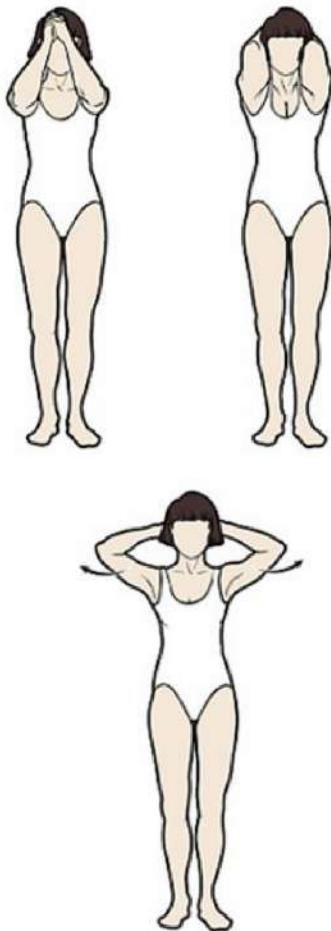
1. Hold a wand with both hands.
2. Slowly raise your hands toward your head. Remember not to raise them higher than your range of motion restriction.
3. If you do not have any range of motion restriction, raise your hands, as far as comfortable for you.
4. If you feel tightness across your incision or chest, hold the position and do the deep breathing exercises.
5. Breathe in while you are raising your hands towards the head,
6. Breathe out while you bring your hands down and returning to the starting position.
7. Do this exercise for ____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

Week 2 onwards

You can start adding up the following simple exercises from week 2 after your surgery. Please consult your physiotherapist for more targeted exercises based on your progress.

1. Chest Fly

This exercise further helps to improve your shoulder range.

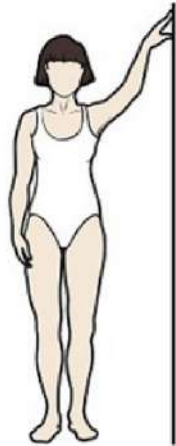


For the first few attempts, try to do this exercise while you are lying on your back comfortably. Place a pillow under your head. It may also be helpful to roll up a small towel and place it under the middle of your back, along your spine. This will help open the front of your chest.

- a. Slowly raise your hands toward your head and slide your hands over your head until you reach the back of your neck.
- b. Spread your elbows out to the sides, as far as comfortable for you.
- c. If you feel tightness across your incision or chest, hold the position and do the deep breathing exercises.
- d. Bring the elbows back towards each other to the starting position.
- e. Breath in while you are spreading your elbows away from each other,
- f. Breath out while you bring your elbows together and returning to the starting position.
- g. Do this exercise for _____ repetitions, _____ times per day.

2. Side wall crawls:

This exercise helps to stretch your chest wall and shoulder muscles that are tight due to the surgery. This also helps to improve range of motion.

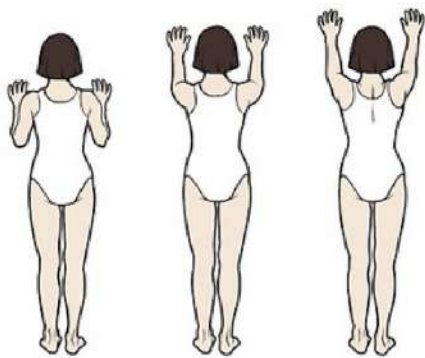


You should not feel any pain doing this exercise. It's normal to feel some tightness or pulling across the side of your chest.

To be effective, you need to make sure only the side of your body faces the wall and try not to turn to the wall.

1. Stand with your affected side close to the wall, about 1 foot away from the wall.
2. Crawl your fingers up the wall as far as you can. Remember to breathe normally.
3. When you reach a point where you feel a good stretch but not pain, do the deep breathing exercise.
4. Return to the starting position by crawling your fingers back down the wall.
5. Do this exercise for ____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

3. Forward Wall Crawls



1. Stand facing a wall, with your toes 6 inches away from the wall.
2. Place both hands against the wall at a comfortable height. Crawl your fingers up the wall as far as you can. Keep both hands at the same height.
3. Try not to look up towards your hands or arch your back.
4. When you reach a point where you feel a good stretch but not pain, do the deep breathing exercise.
5. Return to the starting position by crawling your fingers back down the wall.
6. Do this exercise for ____ repetitions, ____ times per day.

Contributed by Breast Surgery Team, Physiotherapy, Rehabilitation & Allied Health Services

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