

Los Angeles County

University of Southern California

Division of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery

### **Breast Reconstruction Information Booklet**



## Mission Statement

To provide accessible, affordable and culturally sensitive healthcare, one person at a time.

## Contact Numbers

Outpatient Clinic (323) 409-5443

Plastic Surgery Office (323) 409-7788

Wound Check Clinic (323) 409-7828



## ABDOMEN

- **How long will my abdomen feel sore for?**

You will have soreness in your abdomen after you go home. You will be given pain pills to take which will help you feel more comfortable. Do not take aspirin or aspirin containing products for too long after the date of surgery. It will feel numb for several weeks, this may be permanent.

## ACTIVITY

- **Will I need help at home?**

Yes! Arrange for someone to be with you continuously for at least the first 5-7 days after the hospital discharge. You will need help getting in and out of bed, getting to the bathroom, and other daily activities.

- **When can I start doing arm exercises?**

For the first 2 weeks, raise your arm only to the level of your shoulder. Do not raise your arm above your head. You can start doing shoulder shrugs so that they do not get stiff.

- **How much should I lift after I go home?**

You should lift no more than 5 pounds for the first 4-6 weeks. After that you can slowly begin to increase the amount of weight you pick up as you tolerate.

- **Can I drive?**

Do not drive for 2-3 weeks or until you have stopped taking any pain medication and can move your arms and legs comfortably.

- **How long before I can go back to work?**

Often, it is 4-6 weeks before you can resume your usual work schedule. The time frame depends on the type of work you do.

## **CLINIC VISITS**

- **How often will I need to return for clinic visits?**

At first, you will be seen every week for 2-3 weeks. After that, the clinic visits will be less frequent, likely at 1 month, 6 weeks and then 6 month intervals.

- **Do I need to check my new breast by doing self-examination?**

You should resume monthly breast exams to both breasts. You need to get to know the “feel” of your new breast.

- **Will I need to have a mammogram of my new breast?**

Since there is no longer breast tissue present, a mammogram is not usually needed. Your medical oncologist will continue watching you. You will need to have regular mammogram of the other breast.

## **SLEEP**

- **Can I sleep on the site that the new breast is on?**

After you go home there are no restrictions about lying on your side. You may find that it is less comfortable to lie on your surgical side for the first few weeks. Have extra pillows available to help you maintain a comfortable position. Remember the hospital bed can change positions – unless you have a recliner chair at home you won’t be able to do this.

## **BREAST**

- **Will my new breast look the same as it looks right after surgery?**

No, at first there will be swelling in the new breast. It will be a few weeks before most of the swelling goes away. Also, you will not have a nipple and you will have various new scars.

- **Will my new breast “match” the size of my other breast?**

Surgeons do their best to match the size to your other breast, but it may not be perfect.

- **What if my breasts don’t match?**

If your new breast is somewhat smaller or larger than your other breast, surgery can be performed at a later time to get a “match.”

- **Will I have a lot of feeling in my new breast?**

Your new breast will have less sensation to it. It will feel numb and this may be permanent.

- **When do I get a nipple?**

Stage 2 is usually 3 months after the first operation and at least 4-6 weeks AFTER any chemotherapy or radiation has been completed.

- **When can I start wearing a bra?**

You can wear a soft bra without underwire as soon as the drains are out. A front closing “athletic bra” is most comfortable. You may want to have a slightly larger than usual size at first because of swelling. Wear loose fitting clothing that buttons in front; you do not want to pull clothing over your head because it could pull on your incisions.

## **DRAINS**

- **Will I be going home with drain(s)?**

Yes. The drain(s) will be taken out within the first week or so after discharge at your first post-op clinic visit. You will be given instructions on how to care for your drain(s) at home.

- **Can I shower with the drain(s)?**

Yes.

## **STITCHES/STAPLES**

- **How long will I have stitches or staples in?**

About 7-10 days after surgery, they will be taken out in clinic. Many times the doctors use stitches that dissolve on their own.

- **Can I shower even though I have stitches or staples in?**

Yes. Have gentle soap (Ivory, Dial or Baby Soap) available to use. A folding chair to sit on while showering is also helpful.

- **What should I look for at my incision site?**

Redness, swelling, pus like drainage, more warmth than usual or tenderness. These are all signs of infection and need to be reported to your healthcare provider.

- **Will there be any scarring from the stitches or staples?**

There will be scars at the suture/staple lines. The scarring will fade I time, but will always be somewhat visible.

- **Will I feel tired after surgery?**

Be prepared to tire easily after surgery. You will probably find yourself needing to take a few naps a day for at least the first week after surgery.

## **REMINDERS**

### **When should I call the doctor?**

1. Fever over 100.5 or chills which may mean infection.
2. Pain, redness, and /or swelling of the new breast or around the incision. (infection)
3. Change in the feel of the breast from soft to very hard which may mean bleeding.
4. Change in the color of the breast skin (Red: infection/ Purple: hematoma)
5. Bright red bloody fluid in the drain.

### **Can I smoke?**

NO smoking and do not let anyone smoke around you.