

Care after Breast Reduction

This page contains answers to frequently asked questions regarding your care after breast reduction. This information will help you to remember the instructions given to you after surgery.

What will I see when I look into a mirror?

The incisions will be covered with clear, non-stick gauze and a white fluffed gauze dressing held in position with the surgical bra. A small amount of dry blood on the dressing is normal. This initial dressing can be removed 24 hours after your surgery. Your breasts will feel swollen and tight and may appear mildly bruised. The nipples may be retracted from the breast swelling. Some areas of the incisions may have a “ruffled” appearance. These will flatten with time. The bottom of the breasts will appear flat. The breasts will gradually soften but will not take their final shape for months after your surgery. The bruising will last about two weeks. You may have a sensation of numbness of the breasts and nipples.

When can I shower or take a bath?

You normally can shower 24 hours after your surgery using a mild fragrance free soap such as Ivory or Dove. Avoid using very hot water. Your breasts will be tender, so wash this area gently and pat dry with a clean towel. Allow the area to fully dry before putting on your bra (usually ½ hour). If you prefer to take a bath, do not submerge your breasts under water except briefly.

Should I wear a bra?

For your comfort, I recommend that you wear a bra night and day for 3 weeks following your surgery removing the bra only for bathing. You can wear the soft surgical bra provided to you for several days. When you begin to wear a normal bra, it is recommended that you not use an under wire support bra. Some women find that “sports bra” feels the most comfortable early after surgery. After 3 weeks, you may choose to wear other bra styles and also may choose to not wear a bra for periods of time if comfortable.

What bra size will I be?

In general, the number size will not change. Your cup size will be smaller and I will advise you of what cup size to try first. As the swelling in the breasts resolves, you may find that a smaller cup size is needed. Wait several months to purchase a new “wardrobe” of bras.

What can I do after surgery?

You should “take it easy” for several days following the surgery and gradually increase your activity as you feel more comfortable. Avoid heavy exercise also during this time and only gradually return to your normal routine. You can resume all of your normal activities about three weeks after surgery. Try to sleep on your back for 2 weeks using pillows to elevate your upper body.

When can I drive?

You generally should be able to drive about three to five days after surgery if you feel up to it. *You should never drive if you are still taking any pain medication other than Tylenol.*

When will I be able to return to work?

Depending on the type of work you do, you should be able to return to your job as soon as you are comfortable. If your job does not require heavy activity, you should be able to go back in two to four weeks.

How much pain will I have?

The most discomfort that you will have lasts 3 to 5 days, sometimes a little longer. As you feel more comfortable, your need for medication will be less.

What medications should I use?

I will prescribe a pain medication for you and may also have you take an antibiotic. Follow the directions on the bottle for their use. The pain medication will make you feel drowsy. Have someone assist you in your home and do not attempt to drive while you are taking the pain medication. A few days after surgery most women will find that Tylenol will take care of the discomfort. Do not use aspirin for five days after the surgery.

Can I drink alcohol?

Do not drink alcohol for five days after your surgery.

When will I be seen in the office after surgery?

You will normally be seen in the office within one week of your surgery and then at about one month, three months, and six months after surgery to monitor healing. Additional appointments may be necessary and will be determined by your recovery.

How will I know if I am having a problem?

Urgent problems after breast reduction do not occur frequently. These are the complications that will require a change in your post-operative care:

Hematoma (blood collecting under your breast incisions) can occur within a few days of your surgery.

The warning signs are:

- Severe pain that does not respond to medication
- Significant swelling in your breast
- Excessive or growing bruising of the breast or chest wall

Infection is rare following breast reduction. It is normal to have a very small amount of drainage from your incisions for one to 2 days. Signs of infection are:

- Increased temperature
- Increasing drainage from the incisions
- Increasing redness around the incisions

Leg swelling with or without associated pain may indicate a problem with the vein circulation in your leg(s). Although some swelling is to be expected due to your surgery, intravenous fluids given to you during the surgery and your decreased level of activity, this swelling is normally mild, painless and affects both legs evenly. If you have a large amount of leg swelling (either one or both legs) or if you experience pain in your legs contact the office immediately.

Breathing problems after breast reduction are rare but can be a serious complication. If you develop any chest and/or back pain or the feeling of being short of breath you must contact my office or be seen in the nearest emergency medical facility without delay.

Medication reactions may occur with the drugs prescribed for you. If you develop a skin rash, itching, vomiting, or diarrhea, stop taking your medication and contact my office.

If you have any of the above problems or other questions, contact my office.