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Questions Kit
Tips from a Breast Nurse

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Preparing for a mastectomy and reconstruction



One of the most important elements after making the decision to proceed with a mastectomy and reconstruction is to feel comfortable and confident in your choice of surgical team. If something doesn't feel right then get a second opinion.

At least 1-2 weeks prior to your surgery review all the information you have been given and make sure you have a good understanding of what is going to happen.

If you still have unanswered questions, write them down and make another appointment prior to surgery with either the surgeon or Breast Care Nurse and obtain any answers you need. Ask to see photographs of other women going through the same process, touch and feel the tissue expanders and breast implants and above all stay away from the internet – ask your surgeons to get the answers for your care.

Remember no question is a silly question or too small a detail to understand about your surgery. A thorough understanding will help with your surgery and recovery.

Don't leave packing until the last minute – be well prepared and organized and this will decrease your anxiety and create a controlled calm approach to your surgery.

Feel good before your surgery, have your hair cut and styled, have a facial, spend a relaxing day with family and friends – share your journey.



“Every journey is different but we all share the same hope.”



Start a diary of your experience, feelings prior to surgery, take a photograph of your pre surgery breasts, some women even have a farewell dinner for their breasts, celebrate your next step. You may not appreciate all this now but later when your journey is over, you will want to look back and other women going through the same process will be interested in your story and so will your family and friends. It is hard to take it all in while you are in the moment.

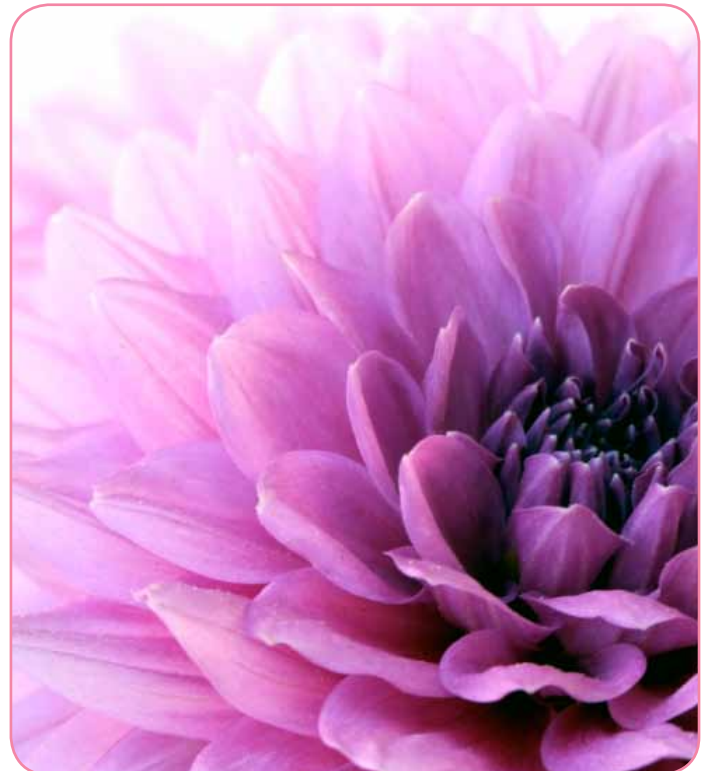
Be prepared for the emotion of the surgery and recovery and roll with it. It is normal to cry and for your moods and emotions to be all over the place. Just don't forget the big picture and the reason why you have chosen to do this.

Prior to your surgery – stop taking or do not take Nurofen, aspirin, fish oil herbal remedies for at least 10 days before surgery to help prevent or reduce bruising and post operative bleeding. Also don't drink red wine for a week before surgery due to its blood thinning properties – white wine is fine.

Get your paperwork in early and confirm your admission date – it can be heartbreaking to discover the date has been changed or the Hospital has not received your admission papers.

Take a trip to the Hospital if practical especially if you have small children as knowing where you will be and being able to visualize this will help everyone's anxiety.

Be realistic about your post operative recovery and arrange help for a minimum of 4-6 weeks. This includes food shopping, washing, cleaning, cooking and child care.





What to expect in the surgery and recovery



Talk to the Anaesthetist before surgery. Some Anaesthetists will call you the night before and will always see you prior to surgery. This will answer questions about induction (having a needle and injecting some drugs to put you off to sleep, having oxygen through a mask, discuss the tube to help you breath whilst you are asleep).

You should discuss the plan for post operative pain relief. Perhaps what has worked for you previously and how you will manage both in hospital and when you go home.

The surgeon will visit you before surgery and draw all over your breasts with a permanent marker (does wash off later) to indicate where your scars will be and line up both breasts.

Understand that the surgery will last a minimum of 4 hours and can last up to 6 hours or more depending on the type of reconstruction you are having.

You will then be in recovery for at least one hour following your surgery. It is common not to remember much of this time.

Be prepared that when you wake up you may have a number of tubes including a drip, urine catheter, drains from your chest. You may also have bandages or strapping over your wounds. Try and relax and not move around too much until you have a good handle on what tubes go where and how much room you have to move without disturbing any of your new paraphernalia.



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It is important to do deep breathing and coughing to help re-inflate your lungs after surgery. Of course don't go overboard and have pain relief on board before attempting coughing.

You may have a sore or irritated throat from the breathing tube so some soothing lozenges beside your bed can help after surgery.

You may not be able to shower for the first week depending on the surgeon's protocol so wash your hair before coming to Hospital and be prepared to have bird baths in the bed. Fresh t-shirts and perfume are a welcome addition.

Most surgeons like you to stay in bed for the first 24 hours. Be prepared to **REST REST REST** as any activity which puts your pulse or blood pressure up will increase the amount of swelling and bruising you will have.

You will be in hospital for anything from 5 – 10 days depending on the amount of drainage you have. Usually you will see the surgeon in the room 2 weeks later and start the expansion or filling stage at about 3 weeks.

You can slowly start to exercise by walking your hand up the wall a little further each day and stretching behind your head and back – remember everything in moderation – *slowly slowly*.

You will wake up without your breasts but remember to focus on the positives and look forward to a newer perkier version of the olds ones.

Don't expect miracles – celebrate any small wins and try to stay positive.



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