



Activity Guidelines Following Breast Tissue Expander/Implant Reconstruction

What does a reconstruction with a tissue expander or implant mean?

This type of reconstruction refers to placing a temporary tissue expander or a permanent implant behind your chest wall to assist with breast reconstruction following mastectomy.

If you have an expander in place, fluid will be periodically injected into the expander over a course of several weeks. This allows the skin and chest wall to stretch so that it can accommodate a permanent implant.

If you have a permanent implant placed at the time of your mastectomy, this permanent implant will not need to be filled over time. The plastic surgeon places the expander or the implant partially under part of your chest muscle (the pectoralis) and closes the skin. It takes about six weeks for a pocket to form around the expander/implant so use of your arm is somewhat protected until the pocket has formed. Ultimately we expect you to return to full function.

What precautions do I have immediately following this surgery?

Typically there will be a drain in place to drain fluid from your chest. Because of the healing required right after surgery, your guidelines are:

- Leave the dressing on until they are removed in the office
- You may shower when approved by your plastic surgeon
- Avoid tub bathing until the sutures are well healed
- You may begin to gently work on regaining your arm motion when cleared by your plastic surgeon
- You may begin a regular walking program as soon as you feel able, but do not break a sweat
- Be mindful of your posture while you are healing
- Try to avoid being round shouldered or staying in a slouched posture

When may I resume my favorite activities?

Because we all heal at a different rate, you should check with your surgeon for any specific considerations for you. In general, one of the best rules of thumb is to **pace yourself** and **gradually** work back into resuming your typical lifestyle. It is important not to put too much stretch or force through your chest muscles too soon, so any activity that feels forceful or painful should be avoided. The timeframes below can serve as a guide for you.

These are guidelines considering your implants. Other restrictions may be in place because of other treatments you are having, so feel free at any time to consult with your surgeon or nurse with any questions that you may have.

At six weeks, it is safe to:

- Lift up to 10 pounds
- Continue walking program
- Work on regaining full shoulder motion
- Gradually resume intercourse
- Use a stationary bike
- Perform light housework such as sweeping, ironing
- Participate in Tai Chi

At 8-10 weeks, it is safe to:

- Lift up to 20 pounds
- Begin yoga
- Start Pilates (no arm gripping)
- Start to run
- Hike
- Begin riding a bike outside
- Perform moderate housework such as scrubbing floors, bathroom, vacuuming
- Perform moderate yard work such as raking, weeding
- Chip and putt with a golf club

At 12-16 weeks, it is safe to:

- Lift up to 25 pounds
- Swim
- Begin playing tennis
- Fully participate in golf
- Use machines in the gym, lightly
- Use a rowing machine
- Kayak
- Sail, but not pull lines

At 16 weeks, it is safe to:

- Gradually progress to unrestricted lifting
- Gym activities as you wish (including chest presses and lat pull downs)
- Gradually resume full pilates
- Downhill and cross country ski
- Fully participate in tennis
- Play volleyball and softball
- Hike as you wish
- Rock climb
- Sailing as you wish
- Perform heavy household chores
- Perform heavy yard work
- Shovel snow

Are there any activities I should always avoid?

- You should always refrain from exposing your surgical scars to sunlight. If that is unavoidable, use very strong sun block
- It may take several months for you to feel as strong as you would like, but our goal is for you to be able to return to being as active as you would like to be
- Always use common sense, and let your body be your guide. If your body says “don’t do” something, respect that message