POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS AFTER AN IN-PATIENT STAY

All patients having surgery that require an inpatient hospital stay will be discharged with appropriate instructions. Details will be given and will be specific to the following areas:

Diet

You will be discharged home on the same diet as you had prior to your hospital admission.

Drain Care

You will have 1 or more drains in place when leaving the hospital. The nurses will review with you how to care for and empty the drains. You will also review how to strip (or milk) the drain 1 to 2 times a day to help keep it open. Remember to squeeze the air out of the collection bulb before you re-insert the stopper. If the drain is full of air and looks like a hand grenade, it is not working. Please record how much comes out of each drain every day. We can arrange a Visiting Nurse to help you with the drain care.

Please call your doctor when the drainage is less than 30cc (or 1 ounce) a day from the drain for two consecutive days. You can expect to have the drain(s) for 1 to 3 weeks.
Shower

If you had breast reconstruction, please check with your plastic surgeon about when you can shower. In some cases you will be told not to shower until the drains are removed.

Most of the time, it is OK to shower after 48 hours. You may lightly shower with your back to the water and to allow warm water to run over the incisions. Use a gentle soap such as Johnson and Johnsons or Dove, and do not scrub the wound. Avoid having the drain(s) pull against your skin while showering by supporting them. Pat your incisions dry after the shower. You may be asked to cover them with a fresh dressing. Depending on what type of reconstruction you have, your team may provide you with a prescription for a post-op camisole (or other garment). This can be purchased from the Boutique in the lobby of the Smilow Cancer Hospital in advance of your surgery. It will have a zip-up front and pockets for the drains. Other post op bras or garments may be recommended by your plastic surgeon.

Incision care

If you had breast reconstruction, your plastic surgeon will decide on your discharge instructions for incision care. In some cases you will be instructed to leave the original dressing in place. If you are told to change the dressing, keep your incision covered for 48 hours after surgery.

After 48 hours, you may remove the clear bandage and gauze. Do not remove the paper strips (steri strips) directly on the skin. If allowed to shower, it is okay to get the paper strips wet in the shower and then pat them dry and leave them open to air. Leave these strips in place for at least 10 days. Sometimes the plastic surgeon will request Bacitracin, Xeroform, or Silvadene be placed on your wounds to moisturize them or prevent infection. Follow the instructions as given by your Plastic Surgeon. If you have flaps, monitor them for changes in color, temperature, drainage or appearance.

For a woman who does NOT have breast reconstruction after a mastectomy, you may initially have a dressing over your incision and will have at least one drain. Please refer to drain care instructions. After 48 hours, the outer dressing on your chest incision can be removed and the area left open to air. Shower as directed above.

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**Pain Control**

Tylenol or a prescribed pain medication may be used every 4 to 6 hours as needed for pain. **Do not take both Tylenol and the pain killer together.** Valium 5 mg is frequently given after breast reconstructive surgery for muscle spasms and can be taken every 6 to 8 hours. Alternate the valium with the narcotic pain medication since the valium is often the more effective way to control the discomfort. Ibuprofen can be used to supplement the pain medications and decrease the dose of the narcotic if you tolerate it. **Remember to take a stool softener such as Colace, Senokot or Milk of Magnesia to avoid constipation while taking narcotic pain medications.**

**Antibiotics**

If you have had a breast reconstruction you will usually continue taking your antibiotics until the drains are removed. If you have not had a reconstruction, your antibiotics will be finished during your hospital stay.

**Driving**

**Do not drive if you are taking a prescribed narcotic for pain, or valium.** Do not drive until your drains are removed. You may drive only when you are not experiencing pain with movement of your arms and upper body. If you had a complete lymph node removal, or a complicated flap reconstruction, this may be 2-3 weeks after surgery.

**Exercise**

Please do not begin any vigorous exercises until your drains are removed, since increased activity may increase the fluid drainage and delay the removal of the drains. Walking and stair climbing are fine and strongly encouraged. If you had a breast reconstruction, you should not do any heavy lifting (greater than 5 pounds) or reaching over your head until your post-op appointment. Use common sense in terms of your activity level and don't be surprised if you need to take naps during your first weeks of recovery. See the section in your guide on post-operative exercises.

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Bra

You may wear a post-operative camisole or a surgical bra, a camisole with an elastic shelf, or nothing at all. Please check with your plastic surgeon. DO NOT WEAR an underwire bra or sports bra until you are told it is OK to do so. Smilow’s Cingari Family Boutique professionals can assist you. You can call 203-200-2273 for an appointment.

When Should I Call My Doctor?

Call the office at (203) 200-2328 any time if you have severe pain or swelling, a fever higher than 101 degrees, or redness extending more than ½ inch beyond the edges of the incision. A small amount of drainage on your bandage is normal. You should call if the bandage becomes soaked with bright red blood, or has any other persistent drainage. Call if there is a foul odor from any incision. Your Jackson Pratt drain(s) will drain bright red-colored fluid that resembles Hawaiian punch initially. This should change to a yellow fluid that resembles chicken broth. This is normal. If the drain fluid becomes cloudy or grey in color or creamy-colored please call your surgeon. Call immediately if your drain will not stay compressed or if there if drainage around the drain site. Call if the drain output suddenly increases a large amount or totally stops draining.

If you are undergoing reconstructive surgery, your plastic surgeon will give you specific instructions. Any other questions regarding wounds, drains, and medications can be directed to your plastic surgeon:

Dr. ________________________________ at ___________________________

Pathology

It can take 7 to 10 business days after surgery before your pathology results are ready. The results of your pathology report will be discussed with you at your post-op appointment. Call (203) 200-2328 if you have not already been given a follow-up appointment. A copy of the report will be provided to you at this appointment.