



## POST-SURGERY INFORMATION: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surgery Date \_\_\_\_\_

Once your surgery is completed, you must follow all the instructions given to you in order to heal properly and have good outcomes.

The following instructions are your obligation. Use this as a checklist of progress as you heal. Included are normal post-surgical experiences and key health considerations that may be a cause of concern.

### TYPICAL POST-OPERATIVE SYMPTOMS

Typical post-surgery symptoms and possible complications to be aware of include the following:

**1. Tightness/heaviness in the chest and/or stiffness; tingling, burning or intermittent shooting pain:** These are normal experiences as the skin, muscles, tissue and sensory nerves heal. Tylenol, or other prescribed pain medication, should will help you cope with any discomfort that may occur, especially within the first 24-hours following your operation. You may also feel minor discomfort at the graft donor site, if you have had a nipple graft. **Consistent sharp pain should be reported to our office immediately.**

**2. Hypersensitivity of nipples, or lack of sensitivity** is normal and will gradually resolve over time. You may also experience a small amount of fluid or milk seeping through the nipples. **If fluid or milk leakage from nipples is in excess or is accompanied by pain, contact our office immediately.**

**3. Shiny skin or any itchy feeling:** Swelling can cause the breasts to appear shiny. As the healing process advances, you may also find a mild to severe itchy feeling of the incisions. An antihistamine, such as Benadryl, can help to alleviate severe, constant itchiness. **If the skin becomes red and hot to the touch, contact our office immediately.**

**4. Bruising and swelling** will mostly resolve in 2-4 weeks; however, residual swelling may persist for a longer period of time.

**5. Asymmetry, the breasts look different, or heal differently.** Breasts may look or feel quite different from one another in the days following surgery. This is normal; no two breasts are perfectly symmetrical in nature or following breast reconstruction surgery.

OUR OFFICE SHOULD BE CONTACTED **IMMEDIATELY** IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

- A high fever, (over 101°) severe nausea and vomiting, continued dizziness or incoherent behavior, such as hallucinations.
- Sudden onset of sharp pain
- Consistent sharp pain or any pain that cannot be controlled by your pain medication.
- Bright red skin that is hot to the touch in the surgical region.
- Excessive bleeding or fluid seeping through the incisions.
- Excessive fluid or milk leaking from nipples, or nipple leakage accompanied by pain.
- A severely misshapen breast or bruising that is localized to one breast or region of the chest.

We encourage you to call us with any questions or concerns you may have. You may call us during office hours at (404) 841-8450. After 5:00 p.m., you may reach a surgeon at (404) 487-2546 *for immediate, emergent attention.*

## CALL 911 FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS:

- Loss of consciousness.
- Shortness of breath or stops breathing altogether.
- Acute chest pain.
- Profuse, uncontrollable bleeding.

**Remain calm. Speak clearly.** Tell the emergency operator that you require emergency medical help. Respond directly to the questions the operator asks you. Be prepared to tell the operator and medical responders the last time the patient was given any medication and exactly how much. **Be certain to tell the operator that this is a post-surgical patient.**

## YOUR RELEASE FROM THE HOSPITAL

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

You will only be released to the care of a responsible adult. All of these instructions must be clear to the adult who will monitor your health and support you, around the clock in your first days home from the hospital.

- ✓ **Rest, but not bed rest:** While rest is important in the early stages of healing, equally important is that you are ambulatory: meaning that you are walking under your own strength. Spend 10 minutes every 2 hours engaged in light walking indoors as you recover. Your caregiver should walk behind or beside you in the event you become unstable or lightheaded.
- ✓ **Recline with your head and chest slightly elevated above your lower body.** This will be more comfortable and can help reduce swelling.
- ✓ **Monitor post-surgical symptoms and be alert to possible complications.** These are defined, along with the actions you should take, on pages 1-2 of this document.
- ✓ **Fluids are critical following surgery.** Stick to non-carbonated, non-alcoholic, caffeine-free, and green tea-free beverages including fruit juices and water, milk, and yogurt drinks. You must consume at least 8 ounces of fluid every 2 hours.
- ✓ **Good nutrition is important during recovery.** Stick with soft, bland, nutritious diet for the first 24 hours. Constipation and bloating are not uncommon after surgery. This can be improved by increasing fluid intake, reducing salt intake and eating foods such as bananas and bran products. Having a stool softener, such as Colace and a laxative such as Miralax, at home may also help alleviate constipation. Taking prescription pain medicine with food, such as a few crackers or applesauce, will help to reduce any nausea you may experience with this medication.
- ✓ **Take all medication, exactly as prescribed.** Complete all antibiotics (if prescribed) unless told otherwise by Dr. Ma. Use the attached POST-SURGERY MEDICATION LOG on page 7 to record the time each medication is given for each day. This will help you to remember when to take each medication.

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

- ✓ **Keep incisions and dressings clean and dry.** You may have drainage from your incisions for the first 24-48 hours following your operation. You will have a plastic nipple splint around your nipple that is covered with Steri-strips, gauze and a waterproof dressing.
- ✓ **You may shower *with the clear, waterproof dressing in place* the day after your operation.**
- ✓ **Do not smoke.** Smoking can greatly impair your safety prior to surgery and your ability to heal following surgery, resulting in more noticeable scars. You must not smoke, and your caregiver must not smoke anywhere near you.
- ✓ **You may apply a cool, not cold, compress to affected sites to alleviate discomfort, swelling or bruising.** Wrap crushed ice or ice packs in a towel before applying to skin. DO NOT apply ice or anything frozen directly to the skin. Cool compresses should be applied for no longer than 20-minute intervals. DO NOT apply heat to affected areas as this will only worsen swelling.
- ✓ **Relax.** Do not engage in any stressful activities. Do not lift, push or pull anything 10 pounds or heavier or engage in vigorous activity for 2 weeks. Take care of no one, and let others tend to you.
- ✓ **If you are taking narcotic pain medication, DO NOT drive until you have been off of the narcotics for at least 48 hours.**
- ✓ **Your first post-operative visit will be approximately 2 weeks after surgery.** At this time, your dressing(s) will be changed. If desired, you may schedule an appointment to have your nipple and areola tattooed for natural coloring 2-3 months after your nipple reconstruction; this can be performed in Dr. Ma's office.

If possible, have your caregiver accompany you to your first postoperative visit scheduled for: \_\_\_\_\_

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

### ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOWING YOUR FIRST POST-OPERATIVE VISIT

As you resume your normal daily activities, do so with ease. During this time you will progress with each day that passes; you must continue proper care and healing.

- **Take antibiotic medications and supplements as directed.** Take pain medication and muscle relaxants only as needed. If applicable, you may wish to switch from prescriptive pain medication to acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- **Maintain daily walking.** Walking is essential every day to prevent the formation of blood clots.
- **Continue wound care as directed.** Take a warm, not hot shower. Do not take a bath. Limit your shower to 10 minutes. Do not remove any dressing. Do not rub your incisions. Apply a fragrance free moisturizer to breast and surrounding skin, however not on your incisions. Your scars will be firm and pink for at least six weeks; it typically takes approximately six months to a year for the scars to fade and flatten. They never disappear completely. After your surgical tape has been removed in the office, ask about Biocorneum, or other scar creams, that you may then begin to use to help with the healing process.
- **Maintain a healthy diet. Do not smoke.** Good nutrition is essential to continued, proper healing. While incisions may have sealed, smoking deprives your body of necessary oxygen that can result in poorly healed, wide, raised scars. You must abstain from smoking for at least 4 weeks following your operation; however, there is no need to resume smoking. You have now gone a great period of time without a cigarette. For your long-term health, there is no need to resume smoking.
- **Discomfort or tightness and tingling will resolve.** Any lingering nipple sensitivity or lack of sensation should begin to greatly improve six weeks following surgery.
- **Practice good sun protection.** Do not expose your breasts to direct sunlight. If you are outdoors, apply at least an SPF 30 to exposed skin at least 15 minutes prior to sun exposure and reapply every 2 hours. Perform this protective regimen even on cloudy days. Your chest region and breast skin are highly susceptible to sunburn or the formation of irregular, darkened pigmentation. If possible, stay out of the sun between the hours of 10am-3pm; this is when the sun's rays are strongest.

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

### YOUR FIRST YEAR

Healing will progress and your breasts will settle into a more final shape and position.

- **Practice monthly breast self exam.** A routine mammogram does not need to be performed on the reconstructed breast. However, it can be performed if requested by your oncologist or other physician.
- **Continue healthy nutrition, fitness and sun protection.**
- **Your scars will continue to refine.** If they become raised, red or thickened, or appear to widen, contact our office. Early intervention is important to achieving well-healed scars. After the incisions have completely healed, you can start applying pressure massage to the incisions to improve the appearance of the scars. Scars are generally refined to fine incision lines one year after surgery.
- **A one-year post surgery follow-up is required.** However, you may call our office at any time with your concerns or for needed follow-up.

**Your body will change with age.** The appearance of your breasts will change too. You may wish to undergo revisional surgery again in the future to help maintain your appearance throughout life. Contact our office with any of your questions or concerns, at any time.



## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

**MEDICATION LOG** Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

**Administer all medication, EXACTLY as prescribed.** Use this document to record the time each medication is given each day.

**Antibiotic:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day  
Time/Day

**Pain medication:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day  
Time/Day

**Muscle relaxant:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day  
Time/Day

**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day  
Time/Day

**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day  
Time/Day

**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_ mg \_\_\_\_\_ x per day



## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS: NIPPLE AND AREOLAR RECONSTRUCTION

Time/Day