TIP SHEET: MASTECTOMY PREPARATION AND RECOVERY

The following suggestions, compiled from our community, will help you prepare for your upcoming mastectomy and make your recovery experience more comfortable.

A checklist from FORCE: FacingOurRisk.Org

Insurance coverage

- [ ] Verify before your consultation that the surgeon, hospital and anesthesia team accept your health insurance.
- [ ] Make sure your insurance agrees to cover your mastectomy and/or reconstruction, including the cost of the surgical facility and the entire surgical team. The Women's Health and Cancer Act of 1998 requires most health plans that cover mastectomy to also cover reconstruction. You can learn more here: https://www.facingourrisk.org/privacy-policy-legal/laws-protections/womens-health-cancer-rights-act/overview.
- [ ] Ask your surgeon's office to explain your deductible and co-pay (if any).
- [ ] Some insurance plans cover the cost of at-home care after surgery, including for nurses and physical therapists.

Emotional well-being

- [ ] It can be extremely helpful to connect with others who are or have been in the same situation as you. Let FORCE help. Participate in our Peer Navigation Program for personalized support, attend a support meeting, or visit our online message board or Facebook group. Visit: FacingOurRisk.org/support.
- [ ] Talk to your doctor about seeing a therapist or getting a prescription for anti-anxiety medication if you experience presurgery anxiety.
- [ ] Explore yoga, deep breathing or other stress-reducing therapies to relax you before surgery.

Notes:

Get your home ready

- [ ] Prepare and freeze at least a week?s worth of meals or easy-prep foods.
- [ ] Organize your pantry and bathroom items so that your necessities are at waist level, where you can easily reach them after surgery.
- [ ] Purchase a leak-proof sippy cup or water bottle with a built-in straw.
- [ ] Clean your house and take care of household tasks ahead of time.
- [ ] Set up a comfortable and quiet ?recovery area? in your home; clear an end table where you can keep the TV remote, phone, books or e-tablet, your medication and a beverage.

Notes:

Preparing for surgery

- [ ] Provide your surgeon with a list of your allergies and all medications, supplements and herbs you take.
- [ ] Tell your surgeon if you smoke! Your surgeon is likely to tell you to quit using tobacco products four weeks or more before and after surgery to improve blood circulation, promote healing and decrease the chance of infection.
- [ ] Be sure you receive and follow your surgeon?s preoperative and postoperative instructions.
- [ ] Take preop and postop photos if you wish to record your journey. Buy a journal to record your thoughts and feelings before and after surgery.
- [ ] Take care of personal matters that won?t be possible during recovery, such as dentist or eye doctor appointments, haircuts and/or coloring or regular appointments for your children.
- [ ] Line up help. List things that will require help during your recovery and then recruit reliable friends and family to help. Don?t be afraid to ask for help cleaning the house, preparing meals, or doing laundry. Ask for volunteers to transport your kids until you can drive, walk the dogs, clean kitty litter, pick up groceries and anything else you need. If you?re tech-savvy, create and share a Google spreadsheet. You can also start a shareable support list at Caringbridge.org (or use the CaringBridge app).
- [ ] Prepare your children ahead of time so that your absence and recovery is not a surprise. Let them know when you?ll be home and how much you look forward to playing games, watching movies and reading books with them, but that you won?t be able to hug or lift them for a while.
- [ ] Have loose-fitting shirts and pajamas that button or zip in the front to wear after surgery. Putting clothes over your head will be difficult at first. You?ll also need comfy, loose-fitting sweatpants or pajama bottoms if you have an abdominal, hip, thigh or buttock flap.
- [ ] Schedule childcare during your recovery. You will be unable to lift, drive or carry children for a while after your surgery.

Notes:

Suggested items to pack for the hospital

- [ ] ID and insurance card. Leave valuables and jewelry at home.
- [ ] Any prescription medications you take, in their original containers with the labels. Some hospitals have policies about prescription medications for in-patients.
- [ ] A case for your eyeglasses, if you wear them (you can?t wear them in the operating room). Do not bring contact lenses to the hospital.
- [ ] Slippers, a zip-up shirt and sweatpants for your trip home.
- [ ] Mastectomy bra as recommended and approved by your surgeon or camisole with drain holder.
- [ ] Toiletries, lip balm and throat lozenges for post-surgery irritation.
- [ ] Pillow for the hospital and for the car ride home; you can place it between the seat belt and your chest for comfort and protection.
- [ ] Charging cords for your devices, your phone and/or tablet and noise-cancelling headphones.
- [ ] Advance directive (optional).

Notes:

Suggestions for a comfortable recovery

- [ ] Follow your doctor?s orders, including wound care routine, restrictions and medication timing.
- [ ] Arrange several pillows on your bed to find a comfortable sleeping position to prevent you from rolling onto your stomach or side or rest/sleep in an oversized chair with an ottoman or recliner.
- [ ] Keep track of your drain output and when you take your medication.
- [ ] Put an absorbent pad or towels on top of your mattress/sheets in case your drains leak.
- [ ] Have hand sanitizer available for helpers who empty your drains.
- [ ] Use a detachable showerhead and/or a chair in the shower.
- [ ] If you don?t have a belt or camisole to hold your drains while showering, secure drains around your waist or loosely around your neck with a shoestring, lanyard or necklace chain.
- [ ] Keep a spill-free water bottle by your bed and drink plenty of liquids to help healing and prevent urinary tract infections.
- [ ] Remember that recovery is temporary, even though you may have some setbacks. Eventually, this will be behind you, and your life without surgeries, doctor appointments and bandages, will return.
- [ ] Most importantly, be kind to yourself. Physically, it?s important to accept your temporary limitations while you are healing. You will not do anyone any favors, especially yourself, by pushing too hard. Emotionally, understand that this is a life-changing event, and allow yourself to be sad if you feel a loss. Acknowledging your feelings and connecting with others can be a huge relief, and FORCE is here to help you through it.

Resources

- [ ] The Complete Guide to Breast Reconstruction by Kathy Steligo: https://www.breastrecon.com/
- [ ] Now What?: A Patient?s Guide to Recovery After Mastectomy by Amy Curran Baker
- [ ] FORCE support and navigation programs: https://facingourrisk.org/support

Notes: