FORCE

Facing Hereditary Cancer EMPOWERED

Mastectomy Surgery Checklist

How to Prepare and Suggestions for Comfort

The following suggestions will help you prepare for your upcoming mastectomy and make your experience more comfortable during recovery.

Ensure costs of surgery are covered by insurance:

- Before consultation, verify that a surgeon accepts your health insurance. Remember, even if the surgery is covered by insurance, there may still be out-of-pocket costs for you. Understand what your deductible and co-pay (if any) will be.
- Make sure your insurance agrees to cover your mastectomy and/or reconstruction, including the cost of the surgical facility and the entire surgical team. If required, be sure to pick a surgeon/facility in your health insurer's network.

Take care of your emotional well-being:

- Connecting with others who are or have been in the same situation as you are can be extremely helpful. Consider participating in FORCE's Peer Navigation Program for personalized support, reaching out to a local FORCE volunteer, visiting the FORCE online message board or calling our helpline at 1-866-288-RISK (7475) for support.
- If you experience pre-surgery anxiety, explore yoga, deep breathing or other holistic stress-reducing therapies. You may want to ask your doctor for a referral to a therapist who may suggest anti-anxiety medication.

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.
- Consider buying a "sippy cup" with 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 and a beverage.

Prepare 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! Quit using tobacco products four weeks or more before and after surgery or as directed by your surgeon, to improve blood circulation, promote healing and decrease the chance of infection.
- Follow all of your surgeon's pre-operative and post-operative instructions.
- Take pre-op and post-op photos if you wish to record your journey. Buy a journal if you'd like to record your thoughts.
- Rent movies and get some books and magazines.
- Take care of other 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 or use SignUpGenius to make a shareable list.
- 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 awhile.
- Have loose-fitting shirts and pajamas that button or zip up in the front to wear after surgery. Putting clothes over your head will be difficult at first. You'll need comfy, loose-fitting sweatpants or pajama bottoms if you're having an abdominal, hip, thigh or buttock flap.

Suggested items to pack for the hospital:

- ID and insurance card. Leave valuables and jewelry at home.
- Advance directive (optional).
- 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 and lip balm.
- Pillow for the car ride home; place it between the seat belt and your chest for comfort and protection.

Resources

- **Confronting Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer** Book by Sue Friedman and Kathy Steligo
- **Now What?: A Patient's Guide to Recovery after Mastectomy** by Amy Curran Baker
- **The Breast Reconstruction Guidebook: Issues and Answers from Research to Recovery** by Kathy Steligo
- **Considering Mastectomy? Questions to Research or Ask Your Surgeon**

Toll-free Helpline: 866-288-RISK (7475)

info@FacingOurRisk.org | FacingOurRisk.org

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 a pad or towel 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.