You have had mastectomy surgery. Here are instructions for home care after your surgery.

**Wound Care**

- Usually, a gauze bandage will cover the surgical wound and Jackson-Pratt® (JP) drain. The JP drain is a small plastic tube attached to a bulb.
- If the bandage is dry, leave it in place. If the bandage is moist, you can replace it with a fresh gauze bandage. After 24 to 48 hours, you should remove the bandage entirely. If you choose to keep the drain area covered, follow the directions below for changing the dressing.
- Under the gauze, thin adhesive strips or a bonding agent cover the wound. Leave these in place until they peel off on their own, in about two weeks.
- It is best to keep the incision and the area where the drain enters the skin dry. You can shower and pat the area dry. Do not bathe in a tub or Jacuzzi until the doctor gives permission.

**Drain Care**

- The JP drain tube removes fluid from your wound. This helps prevent swelling and reduce the risk for infection. The tube is held in place by a few stitches.
- Your health care team will remove the drain when you no longer need it. Your nurse will show you how to empty the drain and record how much fluid came out of the wound.
- Secure the bulb to your clothing with a safety pin. This helps keep the tube from pulling out.

**Stripping the tube**

“Stripping” the tube helps keep blood clots from blocking the tube. Ask your nurse how often you should strip the tube. Follow these steps:

- Hold the tubing with one hand where it leaves the skin. This keeps it from pulling on the skin.
- With an alcohol wipe covering the thumb and first finger of your other hand, pinch the upper end of the tubing.
- Slowly and firmly pull your thumb and first finger down the tubing. The alcohol wipe lets your fingers slide.
- If the pulling hurts or it feels like the tube is coming out of your skin, stop. Begin again more gently.

**Emptying the drain**

Empty your drain twice a day or as instructed by your doctor. Empty it more often if the drain is full. Follow these steps:

- Wash your hands. Strip the tube. Lift the cap on the drain opening.
- Drain the fluid into a measuring cup. Wipe the drain opening clean.
- Squeeze the bulb with your hand until it is collapsed. Replace the cap while the bulb is collapsed. This recreates a vacuum that helps drain fluid from the surgical site. Wash your hands again.
- Record the amount of fluid each time you empty the drain. Share this information with your doctor on your next visit.

**Changing the dressing**

If you choose to keep a bandage over the drain, change it every day. Follow these steps:

- Wash your hands.
- Remove the old bandage.
- Clean the area where the stitch holds the tube in place with an alcohol wipe.
- Put a new bandage on the incision and tube site. Make the bandage large enough to cover the whole incision area.
- Tape the bandage in place.
Pain Relief and Other Medicines

• You will probably have some pain after your surgery. You received a prescription for pain medicine. Please take it as instructed.
• If your pain is not severe, you may prefer to take ibuprofen or acetaminophen instead.
• You received a prescription for antibiotics to help prevent infection. Please take all of these pills as directed.
• Take all of your usual medicines. You may have stopped taking aspirin or blood-thinning medicines before the surgery. Talk with your surgeon about when to start these medicines again.

Other Concerns

• You can eat anything you want after the surgery. For the first few days, it is best to eat light meals.
• Taking several short walks daily on flat surfaces will help speed your recovery. You can use stairs in moderation.
• For the first week after surgery, it will be hard to lift your arms overhead or to lift heavy items. Limit these activities to what is comfortable for you. Do not attempt to lift anything that weighs more than a gallon of milk. Talk to your surgeon about when to start stretching and lifting your arms above shoulder level.
• Try a slightly elevated position with pillows under your arms for more comfortable sleep.
• Button- or zip-front shirts are easier to put on and take off.

Emotional Concerns

Mastectomy surgery can cause emotional distress and concerns about self-image and sexual health. The Patient and Family Support team at Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) works with your cancer care team to offer individual, family, and group counseling with licensed clinical social workers. For more information, visit www.huntsmancancer.org/pfs.

HCI’s Supportive Oncology and Survivorship providers specialize in pain management, emotional and spiritual distress, complementary and integrative medicine, caregiver support, and survivorship. Your cancer care team can refer you to SOS services.

When to Call Your Doctor

• Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your health care team.
• Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

  General
  ✓ Vomiting
  ✓ Fever over 100.4°F

  Incision
  ✓ Incision seems not to be healing
  ✓ Redness, swelling, or warmth around the incision or tube
  ✓ Stitches become loose

  Drain Tube
  ✓ Tube falls out
  ✓ Fluid leaking around the tube
  ✓ New or increased pain around tube

  Drainage
  ✓ Foul-smelling discharge
  ✓ Drainage change from light pink to dark red
  ✓ Sudden increase or decrease in the amount of drainage (over 30 mL, or about two tablespoons)

During business hours, call the Center for Breast Health (Clinic 3A) at 801-213-4269. After hours, call 801-587-7000 and ask for the surgical resident on call.