

The Tissue Expander

You must have a tissue expander before you get your permanent breast prosthesis. The tissue expander is placed under the skin and muscle of your chest. It stretches your skin and muscle. You will come to the doctor's office once a week for the next six to eight weeks. Your tissue expander will slowly be filled with sterile salt water. After the skin has been stretched enough, you will get the permanent prosthesis. Your doctor's office will schedule this for you. You will not be able to have your next surgery until 4 – 8 weeks after your last Chemotherapy treatment. The exact date will be decided on by your reconstructive surgeon.

While The Tissue Expander Is In Place

- You cannot have an MRI. Other imaging tests such as a bone scan, CT, or x-ray are permitted.
- Do not put deodorant, cream, or lotion on or near any break in your skin. This includes your incision lines (scars) or drain sites. Ask your doctor or nurse when it will be safe to use them again.
- Do not soak in a pool, bath tub, hot tub, etc. until approved by your doctor or nurse. This is to lower the risk of irritation and/or infection at the incision line.
- If you shave under your arm on the mastectomy side, use an electric razor only. This is to prevent a cut, which you may not feel due to numbness. This cut could also lead to infection.
- The surgical sites may have less feeling. Do not put a heating pad, hot or cold compress on the surgical area. This is to prevent burn or damage to your skin.
- The tissue expander may set off airport security devices. Tell your doctor or nurse if you plan to travel; you will be given an appropriate letter to take with you.

Following Each Expansion

Your expansions will start approximately two weeks after your surgery. You will get filled every week or every two weeks. Each time the tissue expander is filled, you may feel pressure or tightness in the area. It may last for 3 – 4 days. If needed, your doctor will recommend medicine to help with these symptoms. Tightness may be reduced with warm showers. The skin over your breast mound will be numb. Be sure to check the water temperature before stepping into the shower. Check it on an un-operated area of your body, such as your back or leg.

You may resume your normal activities with the following exceptions:

- Avoid vigorous exercise unless approved by your doctor. For example, do not jog, jump, or run.
 - Do not lift objects greater than 5 lbs. with the affected arm for 6 weeks after surgery.
- *Please check with your breast surgeon if you have had a large number of lymph nodes removed, your lifetime lifting restrictions may be different.
- Do not do any type of exercise that will tighten or bulk your chest muscles.
 - When travelling a long distance by car, pad the seat belt if it falls directly over the tissue expander. **Do not avoid wearing a seat belt.**
 - Wear soft supportive bras. Underwire bras are not advised during the tissue expansion.

Call Your Doctor or Nurse If You Develop:

- Redness, warmth, and/or increased pain over the tissue expander.
- Any changes in your suture line such as drainage, oozing, or separation.
- A temperature of 101° F (38.3° C) or above.
- Shaking chills.
- Sudden shortness of breath or any trouble with breathing.
- Any type of infection.

Doctor _____ Telephone _____

Nurse _____ Telephone _____

After 5 p.m. and on weekends call (212) 639-7900 and ask for the Plastic Surgery Doctor on call.



Memorial Sloan-Kettering
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