

# Managing Pain After Breast Surgery, Breast Tissue Expander Placement and DIEP Surgery

Pain is a known side effect of surgery. With breast surgery, there are different types of pain you may encounter. After mastectomy with expander placement or DIEP (deep inferior epigastric perforator) flap surgery, you will most likely have significant pain. You will receive pain medication during your hospital stay and your pain will be under control before you are discharged home. Please note that there will be some level of pain even when your pain is controlled. Our goal is to decrease your pain to a tolerable level.

At your preoperative visit or upon discharge from the hospital, you will receive pain medication prescriptions. We treat pain using multimodal pain management. This means using several medications to control your pain and limiting the need for opioids.

**A muscle relaxant (typically methocarbamol) is the first medication prescribed.**

This is especially effective for pain related to expander placement and pain after weekly expansions. Breast tissue expanders are sutured to the chest wall, into the muscle. This causes muscle spasm, pain after surgery and pain after expansions. Women often describe expander pain as *pulling, tightness, pressure, heaviness or a feeling like wearing a tight bra that cannot be removed*. After DIEP flap surgery, women often have back pain from walking hunched over. This is a pain caused by muscle spasm, as well. The muscle relaxant will help decrease this pain. For this type of pain, muscle relaxants are often more effective than opioids. Take this medication as prescribed for back pain after DIEP surgery and for muscle-spasm pain after expander placement or expansion.

**After your surgery, you can take ibuprofen.**

Ibuprofen works differently than the other pain medications we prescribe. It is an anti-inflammatory and decreases inflammation which is a cause of pain after surgery. Take this medication with food. Do not take this medication if you have a history of stomach ulcers or kidney disease, or are on blood thinners like Coumadin, Eliquis, or Plavix. Do not take this medication if another provider has advised you to avoid it.

**AdventHealth complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability or sex.**

ATENCIÓN: Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al número siguiente 407-303-3025.

ATANSYON: Si w pale Kreyòl Ayisyen, gen sèvis èd pou lang ki disponib gratis pou ou. Rele nimewo ki anba an 407-303-3025.

**Acetaminophen is prescribed every six hours as needed.**

This medication works in combination with the other medications to control your pain. It is okay to take this along with the ibuprofen.

**Gabapentin is medication for nerve pain.**

Please take this medication routinely, every eight hours, until the medication is finished. This medication will help decrease your need for opioids and decrease the risk of persistent nerve pain related to breast surgery.

**The opioid pain medication prescribed is usually oxycodone.**

Occasionally, a different opioid is prescribed. Please take oxycodone only as instructed. This medication is for rescue only. Take the oxycodone only if the other pain medications are not enough to make the pain tolerable. Do not drive or drink alcohol while you are taking this medication. Please store this medication so it cannot be accessed by children or others for whom it was not intended. Please take any unused opioids, in the original container, to your pharmacy or local law enforcement for drop box disposal. Do not dispose of these in the garbage or in the sewer system.

Please know that opioids commonly cause constipation. We recommend you take a stool softener daily while you use these pain medications



**Please do NOT apply a heating pad or ice packs to any surgery sites. Your ability to feel hot or cold on your skin can change after surgery, and you are at risk of burning yourself or causing frostbite.**

*Please talk to your health care provider before starting new medications.*

*Revised March 2023*

**If you have any questions after your surgery, call our care coordinator at 407-821-3555.**