



PHYSICAL THERAPY SECTION

MASTECTOMY POST-OPERATIVE PRECAUTIONS

The arm on the involved side may swell and be more prone to infection due to the removal of lymph vessels and nodes. The lymph system is the first line of defense against infection.

Here are some guidelines to help prevent infection/swelling in the involved arm:

- Avoid excessive activity for 6 weeks following surgery.
- Elevate your arm above your heart level – prop on pillows while lying supine several times a day and after any increased activity.
- Make every attempt to avoid cuts, scratches, pin pricks, hang nails, insect bites, burns and strong detergents or chemicals.
- Use a thimble when sewing or doing needlepoint.
- Use gloves when gardening, baking or washing dishes.
- Apply insect repellent with an SPF when outdoors.
- Use sun block or wear long sleeves if you will be in the sun for an extended period of time.
- Do not cut or bite cuticles or hangnails.
- Remove things from the oven with the uninvolved arm. If both hands must be used, use good potholders.
- Use a lanolin-based hand lotion several times a day if the hand and arm become dry.
- Blood pressure measurements must be taken on the uninvolved arm.
- Avoid blood withdrawals, injections and vaccinations in the involved arm.
- Do not shave your underarm with a straight razor – try an electric razor.
- Carry your purse or other heavy objects with the uninvolved arm.
- Wear blouses with loose-fitting sleeves – avoid elastic around the arm or wrist.
- Wear your watch and other tight fitting jewelry on the uninvolved arm.

** Immediately contact your Emergency Department or your doctor if your arm becomes red, warm, hard, swollen, or if red streaking appears.