

What to Expect After a Deep Inferior Epigastric Perforator Flap (DIEP)

You are scheduled to have DIEP flap surgery to rebuild your breast. DIEP stands for deep inferior epigastric perforator, which is a blood vessel that runs through the belly.

The surgery consists of taking fat, skin, and blood vessels, but no muscle, from the wall of the lower belly and moving it to your chest to rebuild your breast. The blood vessels are carefully reattached to blood vessels in your chest using microsurgery.

In order to be a candidate for the surgery, you will need to have a test called a CT angiogram (computed tomography angiogram) to look at the blood vessels in your belly.

How do I take care of the incisions?

- Leave the dressing (plastic or glue) in place until we remove them at a follow-up visit.
- Be sure to keep incisions that are not covered clean and check them daily for signs of infection. See list on page 2.
- Do not take a tub bath until the drains are removed and your stitches are healed, which is usually 3 to 4 weeks after surgery.

What can I expect after surgery?

- You are likely to feel tired and sore for 4 to 6 weeks.
- Your stomach will feel tight and it will be hard to stand up straight for 2 weeks.

- Your breasts will not have feeling, although you may be able to feel pressure. In time, some feeling may return.
- Your scars will fade over time. This usually takes 1 to 2 years.

How active can I be after surgery?

You may begin a regular walking program as soon as you feel able. Walking reduces swelling and lowers the chance of getting blood clots. Walk at a comfortable pace and do not push yourself so much that you break a sweat.

Try to keep good posture while you are healing. Do not slouch or sit with your arms in a round-shoulder position.

You should not drive until 48 hours after your last dose of prescription pain medicine and you have full range of motion with your arms. You should be able to wear a seat belt comfortably.

In general, pace yourself and gradually work back into getting back to your typical lifestyle. It is important to not put too much stress or force on your chest and stomach muscles too soon. Do not do any activity that feels forceful or painful. The suggestions on page 2 can serve as a guide.

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About 4 to 6 weeks after surgery, you can:

- lift less than 5 pounds
- continue your walking program
- work on regaining full shoulder motion
- start driving again, as long as you are not taking prescription pain medicines
- do light housework.

About 8 to 10 weeks after surgery, you can:

- lift less than 10 pounds.

About 10 to 12 weeks after surgery, you can:

- lift less than 15 pounds
- use machines in the gym, lightly, and those that are for lower body, not upper body
- do moderate housework, such as vacuuming
- do moderate yard work.

About 16 weeks after surgery, you can:

- gradually progress to lifting any amount of weight that is comfortable
- do gym and physical activities as you wish
- do heavy housework
- do heavy yard work.

Call the Vanderbilt Breast Center at (615) 322-2064, if:

- you have increased swelling or bruising
- swelling and redness lasting more than a few days
- you have really bad or increased pain that does not get better after taking pain medicine
- you have any side effects to the medicines; such as rash, nausea, headache, or vomiting
- you have bleeding from the incisions that cannot be controlled after putting light pressure on the area.

You have any signs of infection, such as:

- you have a temperature over 100.5° F (38° C)
- you have increased redness along the incision
- you have any yellow or green drainage from the incisions or notice a foul smell.