



Wellth Physio & Pilates

Pre-Surgery Prep Checklist

Essential steps for the weeks before your operation

Presented to:

Women preparing for breast cancer surgery

Presented by:

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This checklist is general health information only. It is not personalised medical advice and does not replace consultation with your surgeon, oncologist or physiotherapist. Always follow the advice of your treating team.

Why this checklist exists?

Pre-hab — preparing your body, breath, and home before surgery — is one of the most evidence-backed parts of cancer recovery. And almost no one talks about it.

The numbers:

- ~30% fewer post-operative complications (Trépanier et al., Ann Surg, 2019)
- Shorter hospital stays
- Better shoulder function at 6 weeks
- Lower lymphedema risk when baseline arm measurements are recorded before surgery

*You can't
change that
surgery is
happening.
You can change
how prepared
your body is
when it does.*

How to use this checklist:

- Start as soon as you have a surgery date
- Work through one section at a time, not all at once
- Tick boxes as you go — small wins matter
- Bring your completed copy to your pre-op appointments



Ask Your Surgeon

Essential Questions to Consider

Checklist:

- ☐ What type of surgery is planned? (Mastectomy, lumpectomy, reconstruction type)
- ☐ Will lymph nodes be removed or sampled? (Sentinel node biopsy vs axillary clearance)
- ☐ Will I have surgical drains? For how long?
- ☐ What movement restrictions will I have post-op, and for how long?
- ☐ When can I lift more than 2 kg?
- ☐ When can I drive again?
- ☐ Can I get a physio referral before surgery for baseline measurements?
- ☐ What signs of infection or lymphedema should I watch for?
- ☐ Who do I call after hours if something feels wrong?

Before your surgery, it's crucial to have open conversations with your surgeon. This ensures that you understand the procedure, the expected outcomes, and what recovery will entail.

Gathering this information helps you feel empowered and prepared. Ask questions that clarify what to expect, which can significantly reduce anxiety and enhance your overall experience.



Record Your Baselines

Important metrics to track before surgery

Tracking your baseline measurements ensures a comprehensive understanding of your physical status before surgery. This data helps tailor your rehabilitation and prepares your body for the recovery journey ahead.

Checklist:

- ☐ Bilateral arm circumferences — every 10 cm from wrist to armpit, both sides
- ☐ Shoulder range of motion — flexion, abduction, internal & external rotation
- ☐ Grip strength — left hand and right hand
- ☐ Resting heart rate — measured first thing in the morning
- ☐ Resting breath rate — count breaths per minute, sitting quietly
- ☐ Posture photos — front view, side view, in fitted clothing
- ☐ Core endurance — how long can you hold a gentle plank or side-lying lift
- ☐ Walking pace — average minutes per km on a 20-min walk

Take these measurements within 1–2 weeks of surgery — ideally with a physio.

Re-measure at 2 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 months post-op.



Move

Essential exercises for your recovery

Engaging in gentle movement before surgery can help enhance recovery. Incorporating regular walks and mobility exercises not only prepares your body but also promotes overall well-being leading up to your operation.

Checklist:

- ☐ Walking — 20–30 minutes daily, brisk enough to talk-but-not-sing
- ☐ Shoulder mobility — 5 minutes daily, pain-free range only
- ☐ Light resistance training — 2x per week, focus on back, arms, legs
- ☐ Core activation — gentle, breath-led (NOT sit-ups or crunches)
- ☐ Stretch chest and front of shoulders daily — doorway stretch is perfect
- ☐ Practice getting in and out of bed sideways — you'll need this post-op
- ☐ Practice deep belly breathing during movement

Building strength through light resistance and core activation will support your recovery post-surgery. Remember to listen to your body and stop any activity that causes discomfort or pain during this process.

Rules:

- If it pinches, pulls or hurts — stop
- Slow and steady beats hard and once
- Walk before you lift; lift before you push



Calm

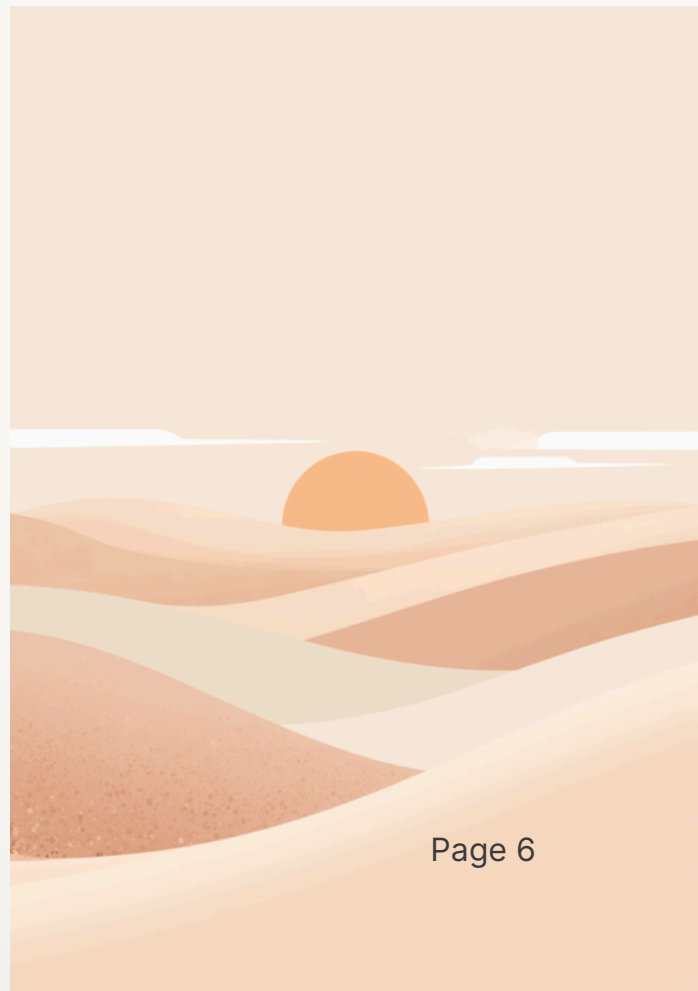
Techniques for a peaceful mindset

Incorporating calming techniques into your routine can significantly enhance your mental and emotional well-being as you prepare for surgery. Focus on practices that nurture relaxation and reduce anxiety levels.

Simple exercises like deep breathing and mindful awareness will help you feel more grounded. Remember, taking time for yourself can make a profound difference in your surgical experience and recovery journey.

Checklist:

- ☐ 4-7-8 breathing — inhale 4 sec, hold 7 sec, exhale 8 sec. 3 rounds, 3x daily
- ☐ Diaphragm awareness — hand on lower ribs, feel them widen with each breath
- ☐ 20 minutes outside daily — natural light resets cortisol
- ☐ Sleep 7+ hours — consistent bed and wake times
- ☐ Diet: Consult with a dietician
- ☐ Hydrate — 30 ml per kg body weight daily, more if active
- ☐ One thing daily that calms you



Set Up Your Home

Create a comfortable recovery environment

Preparing your home in advance can significantly ease your recovery. Ensure that your environment promotes comfort and accessibility, allowing you to focus on healing without unnecessary stress.

Wear:

- ☐ Loose front-button shirts and zip hoodies (no overhead pulling)
- ☐ Soft, seamless bras or post-surgical camisoles
- ☐ Drawstring pants or loose joggers

Sleep & rest:

- ☐ Wedge pillow or extra pillows for elevated sleep
- ☐ Small pillow to place under the affected arm
- ☐ Bedside table within easy reach

Kitchen:

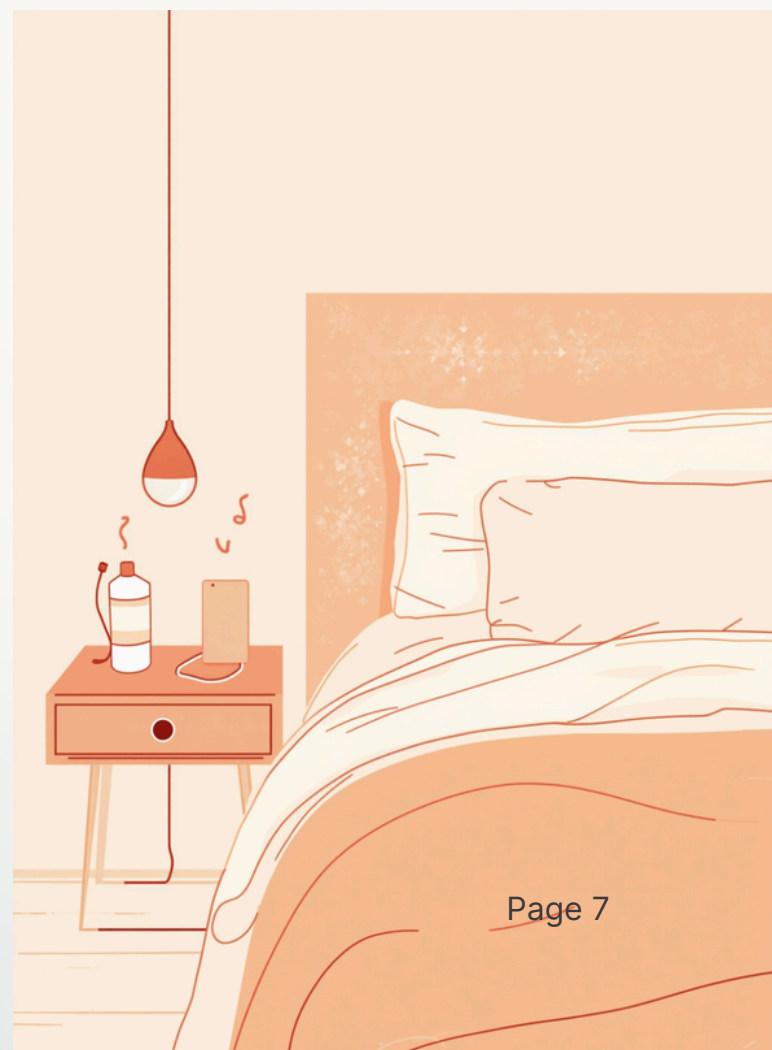
- ☐ Pre-cook and freeze 5–7 meals for week 1
- ☐ Move daily-use items to waist-height shelves
- ☐ Stock soft, easy-to-open snacks

Bathroom:

- ☐ Hand-held shower head if possible
- ☐ Bath chair if balance feels off
- ☐ Loofah on a long handle

Bedside kit:

- ☐ Water bottle with straw
- ☐ Phone charger at bed height
- ☐ Lip balm, tissues, hand cream
- ☐ Notebook + pen for questions
- ☐ Medication list and dosing schedule



You're not behind. You're early.

Most women never get told about pre-hab. You did. That puts you ahead of the curve before you've even started.

If you want me to walk you through this personally — take your baselines, build your movement plan, and answer your questions before surgery- I offer 1:1 Pre-Hab Consults at Wellth Physio & Pilates.

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