



MASTECTOMY READINESS GUIDE

Information and tips from a
breast cancer survivor on how to
prepare and recover from surgery





THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE

Welcome. I know we're not meeting in the best of circumstances... because if you're here, it likely means you or someone you love has been diagnosed with breast cancer—and I'm sorry we're in this club together. However, there's a lot of hope in this club, and I hope with the right tools and support, you can thrive through this challenge life has thrown your way.

This guide compiles my advice after going through a double mastectomy myself in February 2025. I received a lot of advice from other ladies who have been through it as well, and tried to remember all the things that were most helpful to me along the way.

There will be some challenging days, but a positive outlook is powerful. Aim to find beauty every day in the little things and accept the love and support of those around you. As part of your support system, I'm happy to help with non-medical questions when I can—you can reach me by email: support@nuchihealth.com.

I'm creating more resources as well, so please follow **@nuchihealth** on your favorite social platform(s) to hear when new resources are available. We're on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. I wish you all the best in your healing journey.

You can do hard things, and you've got this!



BEFORE SURGERY

The 2 Weeks before surgery:

It's important to think about preparation at least 2 weeks in advance so you can order and receive any items you need and prepare your recovery space.

- **Order your supplies** based on my recommendation list (below) and anything else you anticipate needing.
- **Prepare your recovery space:** once your supplies are in, keep them gathered in a common place so you can place them where you need them before surgery. If you have a caregiver, inform them of where important supplies will be located (the more you can keep supplies in a common space, the better so anyone helping can find what they need!).
- **Organize clothes:** Keep the clothes you'll wear for the week or so post-surgery in an easy-access place. You'll want open-front shirts, pajamas, comfy pants, underwear, and socks somewhere you or your caregiver can easily access near where you'll be recovering. And have an extra set of sheets available if needed (this is something you definitely can't do post-surgery, so if you need a sheet change, please ask for someone else to help!).
- **Prepare your communication list** such as an email group. I asked friends and family if they wanted to be included on my update emails and formed a list. Prior to surgery, I emailed the list (always Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) so people aren't getting a ton of reply emails!) with the 'communications plan', so everyone knew the communications point person and when to expect emails on surgery day.
- **Clean house** (if you can). I know there's a lot going on, but if you or someone else can give your home a good cleaning before surgery, this will a) be more sanitary for you to recover in, and b) allow some time before someone needs to help clean again. You won't be able to do repetitive movements (e.g. vacuuming) or move your arms much in the first few weeks. Having a plan for who will help with necessary cleaning tasks in the weeks after surgery is helpful.
- **Pamper yourself!** Make any appointments that you may want such as hair color and/or cut, a massage to relax, or other aesthetic treatments you may normally get since you won't be able to get these for a while. You generally can't have artificial nails or polish for surgery, so if you're going for a mani/pedi – opt for a basic one with no polish. Same goes for eyelash extensions – they will want you to have natural, make-up free lashes in surgery.



BEFORE SURGERY

- **Stock your pantry and freezer:** Consider having healthy and convenient options ready for the first few days post-surgery. It's important to get good nutrition as you recover, so think about easy to prepare meals that pack a nutrition punch (protein, whole foods, fruits and veggies), and stock your freezer with easy-to-reheat options. I was on a smoothie kick for breakfast after surgery, which my caregiver made for me with protein powder, frozen berries, kefir, and some supplements I took. If friends ask to bring meals, you can always ask one of them to help you coordinate a calendar for meal deliveries (don't be afraid to ask for help – people want to help you!).
 - Since you won't be able to reach for much, move any plates, seasonings, things you use often in the kitchen down to counter level!
- **Consider dependent care:** Who depends on you? A child, a pet, anyone else? Plan ahead for how to continue necessary care for people and pets, as you will not be able to do much for several days, and even after you can move more – no lifting over ~5 pounds or repetitive movement for many weeks after surgery.
- **Complete a will** if you don't have one, and inform your family of your wishes. I know this is a scary one, but in the very unlikely scenario that something goes wrong during surgery, it's important to have a conversation with your family about your wishes and have at least a minimal will in place. You can make a simple will at freewill.com, but you will need to have it notarized and witnessed by 2 individuals besides yourself (requirements may vary by state).
- **Consider adding a handheld shower attachment** if you don't already have one. This will make it easier for a caregiver to assist you with bathing if needed.

Below is my list of items that were recommended or helpful for me in recovery. I've linked to exact items I used when available. As an Amazon Associate I may earn a commission from your purchase based on these links. Order as many of these items as you think will be helpful for you prior to surgery so you have them on hand.

ESSENTIALS:

- Mastectomy recovery shirts and PJs with inside pockets for your drain bulbs
 - Gownies were really the best, but they seem to be on a hiatus right now:
 - Pajama set: <https://amzn.to/3ZClaJ2>
 - Mastectomy/surgery recovery shirt: <https://amzn.to/3Fdwr5E>
 - If Gownies remain unavailable, look for options with snaps on the inside to secure drainage tubes as in this example. This is more convenient than using safety pins to keep drain lines in place: <https://amzn.to/4jsdqQV>



BEFORE SURGERY

- Loose-fitting pull-on pants (cotton or silky, no Spandex or tights!) and zip-front hoodies or robes for when you get cold
- Comfortable (preferably cotton) underwear
- No-skid socks (I had a little basket full of socks and undies near my recovery bed so I always had a clean pair handy when I needed one)
- Zip-front sports bra, one-size up: <https://amzn.to/43RP5zq>
- Unscented hygiene items:
 - Unscented, No-rinse bath wipes (I don't recommend more than 1 package, you likely won't get through them all before you can shower yourself):
<https://amzn.to/43gXxbq>
 - Unscented Shampoo and Body Wash: this one is nice because it doubles as both:
<https://amzn.to/44Znpdg>
 - Unscented Dry Shampoo to use the first few days post-surgery and for in between hair washes. This one is the most cost-effective, but does have a light scent:
<https://amzn.to/43Gs5Cx>
 - Unscented face cleansing wipes: any brand works, this is an example:
<https://amzn.to/45szPKD>

NON-ESSENTIAL (but nice to have)

- Drain supplies:
 - Alcohol pads, useful to use for 'gliding' in stripping the lines of your drains:
<https://amzn.to/45utxKs>
 - Gloves: optional, but more sanitary than bare hands; double check which size is best for your caregiver: <https://amzn.to/4kKGDrD>
- Fanny pack or breathable drain holder pouch for showering and/or outings where you don't wear a mastectomy shirt with the internal pockets
 - Examples: <https://amzn.to/4kjrayW> or <https://amzn.to/4kjuMAW>
- Medications:
 - I alternated acetaminophen (Tylenol) with the hospital-provided NSAID celecoxib (Celebrex, Elyxyb). You may want to have Tylenol on hand to alternate for pain management if recommended by your healthcare team: <https://amzn.to/4mBk4Hx>



BEFORE SURGERY

- **Tracking medications:** It's important to keep track of what times you're supposed to take your various medications and keep a log. Having a **calendar, posterboard, or white board** with the schedule for each day where you or your caregivers can track your medications is important. You'll also be training your drain outputs.
- Adjustable pillows
 - You'll be sleeping on your back (and often with torso elevated). This can be an adjustment for many. This pillow helped with finding comfortable sleeping positions, especially using the small half moon one under my knees to help with back pain. I recommend ordering it and opening it well in advance of surgery to let the chemical smell "air out" before you need to use it: <https://amzn.to/4kqp93V>
 - I already had this long before surgery, which I also used in the pillow mix: <https://amzn.to/3HgZUCr>
- TV tray and/or bed tray for keeping items near your bedside and eating meals
 - I had this by my bed with remotes, phone, and other items I reached for often: <https://amzn.to/3HcEWob>
 - This tray is small, but something like this for meals and/or working on a laptop can be helpful: <https://amzn.to/4khiFEp>
- Shower support
 - Tbh, I had a plastic folding chair I put in my shower, but that's probably not the safest option, especially if you're unsteady. A shower chair like this can help. There are options with or without back support: <https://amzn.to/43DwtlK>
 - Handheld shower head: If someone is assisting you with bathing, this makes life a lot easier. You will want to get it installed in the weeks before surgery. This is a cost-effective example, but there are a range of options if you want higher quality: <https://amzn.to/43CnmRY>
- A "Grabber": Someone sent this to me, and I kept it by my bedside in the early days. Helpful for reaching things like a charging cord or something you drop, but definitely not a necessity: <https://amzn.to/3Z6XAnK>
- A seatbelt pillow: You typically won't be allowed to drive until your drains are removed (~2 weeks), but you'll likely be riding in a car during this time. This or a thin pillow can for as long as you need it: <https://amzn.to/43Na6eJ>



SURGERY AND HOSPITAL

The night before:

- Shower the evening before so this is one less thing to worry about the morning of surgery (unless you're instructed to shower the morning of)
- Spray washed hair with unscented dry shampoo to help control oil in the coming days!
- Make sure your hospital bag is packed and ready to go (Note, I didn't stay a night at the hospital for my double mastectomy. I went home the same day and had at-home nursing care for a few days instead). If you're staying a night in the hospital, pack a hospital bag based on expected nights of stay:
 - Button-up recovery shirt(s), preferably with inside pockets and clips for your drains as listed above
 - Comfortable, easy-on pants and underwear
 - No-slip socks or slippers
 - An open-front button/zip hoodie or jacket if it will be cold (nothing that pulls over your head!)
 - Brush or comb
 - Face wipes (optional; you shouldn't need to bring the bath wipes)
 - Any medications you normally take, toothbrush, contacts/glasses, etc.
 - Other items for comfort and entertainment:
 - Neck or small pillow
 - Lip balm, face/hand moisturizer
 - Cell phone and/or tablet, charger, headphones
 - A book or magazines if you typically read

At the hospital:

- **Arrive early** and be prepared for what will happen. Ask your surgery team in advance how the surgery day will progress, so you know what to expect. When you know what to expect, it can help ease anxiety and nervousness about the day.
- **Ask for an extra bra.** They may send you home with or wearing a surgical bra. Ask for a second surgical bra so you can rotate them for washing.
- **Have a point person in charge of communications.** I had an email list I shared with my point person in advance. This person emailed the entire list (Bcc) updates throughout so everyone in my circle stayed up to date. This is much more efficient than someone trying to respond to lots of text messages. You can also let your email group know the plan in advance, so they know to expect updates from your point person.



AT HOME POST-SURGERY

- **REST!** That's your job in the first few days post surgery. Your body has been through a lot. Give yourself permission to rest. That said...
- **MOVE** (a little): If you're able to walk, it's generally recommended to get some light activity a few times per day with assistance. Make sure you are steady on your feet and cleared by your healthcare team to do this. I walked around my neighborhood a few times a day for ~5-15 minutes per walk (building over time) with a partner to make sure I was steady and feeling well throughout. The more you can move early on (while minimizing your arm movements) the better!
- **NOURISH:** Feed your body the nutrients it needs to support healing like plenty of protein, fruits, vegetables, fiber to keep your gut moving (anesthesia and pain medications can cause slow gut motility and constipation), plenty of fluids, and healthy fats (e.g. avocado, olive oil, fatty fish, nuts, seeds, etc.).
- **POOP:** Your healthcare team will tell you when to be concerned about lack of a bowel movement, but it can be several days after surgery before you have one. Miralax and Sennosides/docusate (e.g. Senokot-S) are often recommended and/or prescribed, but check with your provider. Increasing the dose of the sennosides I was prescribed eventually helped me with this one.
- **HEAL:** You've been through a lot. There can be a wide range of emotions post-surgery, and it's ok to allow yourself to go through the emotions as they come. Give yourself grace. Know you will come out on the other side a stronger and more resilient human. I wish you all the best in your journey ❤️