



Breast Reduction (Mammoplasty) Recovery Guide

Timeline, Supplies & Smart Milestones

Considering **breast reduction** or already on the schedule?

This guide gives you the exact recovery arc, what to buy, how to sleep, when to wear (and switch) bras, and the red flags that warrant a call.

It also includes practical work/parenting tips and scar-care tactics that actually move the needle.

Typical Recovery Timeline

Timeframe	What most patients can do
Day 0–2	Rest, short indoor walks every 1–2 hours, sleep on back with pillows, manage meds/drains (if placed), no lifting >5–10 lb.
Days 3–7	Shower if cleared, longer light walks, laptop/phone tasks in short blocks, pain steadily trending down.
Week 2	Many return to desk work (with movement breaks), switch to non-underwire support bralette if advised, steri-strips/sutures addressed per plan.
Weeks 3–4	Energy rebounds, most daily activities resume (no running/HIIT/upper-body loading), begin gentle scar program if cleared.
Weeks 5–6	Light cardio + lower-body training; gradual return to driving, classroom/retail roles, and social life.
Months 2–3	Add upper-body work as cleared; swelling/spots of firmness continue to soften; most feel “normal” day to day.
Months 6–12	Scars mature (pink → lighter); final shape settles as swelling fades. SPF and silicone remain your best friends.

Having a combined procedure (e.g., reduction + lift or lipo)? Expect a slightly slower pace and more support at home the first 2 weeks.

What to Prep Before Surgery

Recovery supplies

- 2–3 front-closing, non-underwire support bras (wash/rotate)
- Silicone gel or sheets (start only when incisions are sealed and you're cleared)
- Gauze, non-stick pads, paper tape for early dressing changes
- Recliner or wedge pillow (sleep on your back, torso slightly elevated)
- Stool softener (and a gentle laxative on standby)
- Thermometer, pill organizer, water bottle
- Loose zip or button-front tops; no overhead pulling the first 1–2 weeks
- Cold packs (wrapped—no direct ice on skin or incisions)

Day-By-Day: What You'll Feel & What to Do

Days 0–2: Protect and prevent

- **Pain & tightness:** Expect pressure and soreness, especially along the incision lines and outer chest. Take meds on schedule; staying ahead of pain beats chasing it.
- **Positioning:** Sleep on your back, upper body elevated, pillows under arms for comfort.
- **Walking:** Short, frequent indoor walks keep your lungs clear and lower clot risk.
- **Wound care:** Keep dressings dry/intact as instructed. Don't apply lotions/creams unless we say so.
- **Hydration & bowels:** Start stool softener day 0. Aim for water + fiber; add a gentle laxative if no BM by day 3–4.
- **Support bra:** Wear it **24/7** unless showering (after you're cleared).

⚠ Call urgently for fever >101°F, chest pain/shortness of breath, one-sided calf pain, rapidly increasing breast size/tightness on one side (possible hematoma), foul drainage, or spreading redness.

Days 3–7: Set your rhythm

- **Shower** once we clear you (usually day 2–3). Lukewarm water, gentle pat-dry; no soaking.
- **Activity:** Increase short walks, gentle arm range of motion below shoulder height. No lifting >5–10 lb, pushing/pulling, or overhead reaching.
- **Work:** Light laptop tasks are fine in short blocks with movement breaks every hour.
- **Driving:** Only when you're off narcotics, can react/brake hard without pain, and turning the wheel doesn't strain incisions.

Week 2: Turning the corner

Dressings/Steri-strips may come off per plan; some sutures dissolve on their own, others are removed in clinic.

- **Bra plan:** Many remain in surgical/no-wire bras 24/7; some transition to a soft bralette. Underwire waits until you're cleared—typically 6–8+ weeks.
- **Desk work:** Most can return (remote or in-office) with frequent walks and no lifting.

Weeks 3–4: Back to everyday life (with limits)

- **Energy & posture:** Expect a “good day/bad day” pattern. That’s normal.
- **Cardio:** Gentle treadmill or stationary bike as cleared.
- **Scar care:** If incisions are sealed and you're cleared, start silicone gel/sheets daily and continue 8–12+ weeks. Absolute SPF on scars for 12 months.

Weeks 5–6: Fitness and social life grow back

- **Exercise:** Progress cardio; add lower-body and light upper-body work that doesn't pull the chest. No chest presses, pushups, or heavy shoulder work until you're cleared.
- **Travel:** Short flights are often okay with surgeon clearance; walk the aisle, hydrate, consider compression stockings.

Months 2–3: Smoothing phase

- **Sensation:** Nipple-areola complex (NAC) can be numb, extra sensitive, or “zingy.” Nerves wake up slowly—this can take months.
- **Upper-body training:** Resume gradually per your plan; listen to your body.

Months 6–12: Final shape & scar maturation

Scars fade from pink to lighter tones; firmness softens. Some asymmetry and small “dog-ears” at ends of incisions can occur and often settle.

We'll time your after-photos when swelling/shape plateau so you can see meaningful change.

Pain, Swelling, and Sensation—What's Normal?

- **Pain** steadily decreases after day 3–4. Expect soreness with certain motions for 2–3 weeks.
- **Swelling** peaks in week 1, then declines. Evening puffiness can linger for several weeks.
- **Bruising** resolves in 10–14 days.
- **Numb/sensitive zones** around the NAC and lower breast are common and improve over months.

Bra & Garment Strategy

- **Weeks 0–6+:** Soft, supportive, non-underwire bra 24/7 (except to shower).
- **Underwire:** Wait until cleared (commonly 6–8+ weeks) to prevent irritation along incisions.
- **Sports bras:** Choose front-zip styles that don't compress the upper pole too aggressively early on.
- **Fit checks:** If seams rub or straps dig, swap styles—comfort + support > brand.

Scar Care That Works

- Keep incisions clean, dry, and flat—no tension or rubbing.
- Silicone gel/sheets once sealed (and cleared): daily use for 8–12+ weeks minimum.
- Paper tape or hypoallergenic tape across the line can off-load tension early.
- Massage only if/when we okay it—usually after the skin is fully sealed.
- SPF 30–50 on scars for 12 months. Sun darkens scars.

Activity Rules (Lifting, Arms, Sex, and Saunas)

- **Lifting:** <5–10 lb for 2 weeks; <20 lb until week 4–6 or clearance.
- **Arms:** Keep motions below shoulder height for the first 1–2 weeks; no overhead reaching or heavy grocery bags early.
- **Sex:** When you're mobile, off narcotics, and not compressing the breasts—usually after 2–3 weeks; be gentle and avoid pressure on incisions.
- **Pools/Hot tubs/Saunas:** Only after incisions are closed and we give the green light (often 4–6+ weeks). Heat can worsen swelling early.

Work, Parenting, and Driving

- **Remote/desk:** 7–14 days for most.
- **On-your-feet work (retail/teaching):** ~2–3+ weeks.
- **Manual labor/childcare with lifting:** 4–6+ weeks, staged.
- **Driving:** Off narcotics + safe range of motion to shoulder-check and brake hard.

We'll provide a work letter that outlines safe duty modifications.

Read our **[breast reductions insurance guide](#)** to lock in approvals and see **[how to choose the right cosmetic surgeon](#)** to vet credentials and facility safety.

Medication, Nutrition & Habits

- **Medication:** Take pain meds on schedule for the first 48–72 hours; then taper as tolerated.
- **NSAIDs** (ibuprofen, etc.) only if/when cleared.
- **Hydration + protein** support healing; keep salt modest to manage swelling.
- **Nicotine** (any form) and vaping impair blood flow—strictly avoid per your pre-op plan (typically 4–6 weeks before/after).
- **Alcohol:** None while taking pain meds/antibiotics; moderate thereafter per guidance.

Breastfeeding, Sensation & NAC Notes

Breastfeeding After Reduction

Some patients can still lactate; others cannot, depending on technique and tissue preservation. If future breastfeeding is a priority, tell us at consult; we'll review the approach and trade-offs.

Nipple sensation usually improves over months; some patients experience permanent change.

Red Flags (Call Us Immediately If You Notice)

- Fever **>101°F**, chills, or feeling acutely unwell
- Rapidly enlarging, tense swelling in one breast (possible hematoma)
- Worsening asymmetric pain or sudden bruising spread
- Spreading redness, foul odor, or pus-like drainage
- Shortness of breath, chest pain, or one-sided calf pain (possible clot)
- Black/dusky skin near the incision or NAC (urgent evaluation)

You'll leave surgery with our same-day contact protocol. Use it.

Cost, Insurance & Smarter Payments

If symptoms like back/neck pain, shoulder grooving, rashes, or activity limits are documented, insurance may help.

Start your paper trail early with primary-care visits, physical therapy notes, supportive bra trials, photos, and weight-stability logs.

Read our [breast reduction insurance guide](#) for criteria, CPT/ICD basics, and appeal tactics. If you're paying out of pocket, we'll map phased options and monthly payments.

Pro Tip: compare promo APRs, fees, and payoff timelines side-by-side before choosing a lender.

Quick Answers to Questions You May Have

When can I switch to an underwire bra?

Usually 6–8+ weeks once incisions are fully healed and tenderness is minimal. We'll confirm at your follow-up.

Why is one breast a bit higher or firmer?

Mild asymmetry is common early. Swelling and internal settling even out over 6–12 weeks. We track this at visits.

Can I sleep on my side?

Back-sleeping for 2–3 weeks is safest. Many transition to supported side-sleep with pillows after clearance.

Will I lose weight from the reduction?

We remove tissue by volume, not weight loss goals. Clothes typically fit better; posture and activity often improve.

Ready to plan?

We'll customize timelines, work-return letters, and compression protocols to your body and your job.



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