

5 Exercise Rules to Follow After Breast Surgery

Melanie Rud • Feb 11, 2021

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1. Get your steps in

This rule applies to all breast surgeries and is the most immediate thing you can and should do. “These operations come with a risk of developing a blood clot, and walking around as soon as possible, starting the day of surgery, can help mitigate this risk,” explains [Dr. Melissa Doft](#), a board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City. Walking for 10 minutes, four times per day, is an absolute must for the first week post-surgery, she says.

3. Ease back to normal slowly

Scar tissue is about 50% healed at four weeks post-surgery. Dr. Cassileth says that this is when you can start incorporating some types of exercises that work your chest but in a very careful and gradual way. “If you typically do planks, keep your knees down until you’re six weeks out so that your pectoral muscles aren’t bearing your full body weight,” she recommends, adding that the same goes for any type of yoga position. And if you usually do push-ups, keep your knees down and hands close to your body, particularly if you just had a breast augmentation; wider-stance push-ups can force the implant sideways, says Dr. Cassileth.

If you were previously doing any type of lifting, you can start with very light weights after about a month, notes Dr. Doft. Just start lighter than usual—think: three pounds instead of five, or one pound instead of three pounds, she says. She also says that this is a good time to start to incorporate gentle, lower-body-focused workouts, such as the lower-body portion of a barre class.

As far as abdominal or core exercises go, Dr. Doft recommends waiting at least four to six weeks before incorporating these, particularly if you’ve had an augmentation: “The abdomen is very close to the breast incision and will affect the scarring of the incision and, perhaps, the placement of the implants,” she explains.

4. Be careful with cardio

Any type of high-impact exercise that gets your heart pumping and blood flowing poses a risk to your newly forming scars—particularly in the case of a breast reduction, when the scars can be bigger and really need time to heal properly, says Dr. Doft. “Aerobic exercise raises your blood pressure, which, in turn, can increase the redness of the scars,” she explains. Dr. Cassileth agrees, adding that the repeated pounding and steps from activities such as jogging or kickboxing pull on the incisions and can even cause the sutures to rip.

Swimming may be low-impact, but that’s off-limits for six weeks, since it requires you to constantly be stretching your arms overhead and puts tension on your chest for an extended period of time, notes Dr. Doft. Along with regular walking, she suggests very low-key, easy rides on a stationary bike if you are craving some type of cardio exercise.

5. Always wear a bra when you work out

“Many patients think they can run around and work out without a bra, especially after a breast reduction,” notes Dr. Cassileth. Not the case. Wearing a **supportive bra** whenever you do start to exercise is paramount, regardless of the surgery you’ve had: “It’s going to help minimize both pain and movement of the breasts and scars,” explains Dr. Doft. The big caveat? Make sure your bra fits your new breasts properly. An ill-fitting bra can cause rubbing or chafing along the incision and end up creating a new wound on top of the scar, warns Dr. Cassileth. Check for any signs of chafing or irritation every few minutes while exercising, until you’re certain that the bra you’re wearing fits well and comfortably.

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