

POST-SURGICAL RECOVERY GUIDE · 03

Lymphatic drainage after breast surgery

Tight. Full. A little high and heavy.

The first weeks after breast surgery can feel like wearing a sports bra two sizes too small... all day and all night.

Gentle lymphatic work can take the edge off, and help you heal more comfortably.

01

What's happening in your body

Most lymph from the breast drains toward the lymph nodes in your armpit, with some travelling toward nodes along the breastbone. Any breast surgery creates swelling that has to travel those same routes.

- **Augmentation:** swelling often sits in the upper chest, along the sides and under the arms. The implant takes up space, so tissue feels tight and stretched.
- **Lift or reduction:** longer incisions (often the "anchor" shape) disrupt more small vessels, so there's more fluid, especially along the lower breast and sides. If liposuction was added to the sides, even more.
- **Explant or en bloc capsulectomy:** removing implants and their capsule leaves a space that fills with fluid. Post-explant care calls for its own protocol because swelling can be significant. Fat grafting to the breast after explant adds a lipo donor site to care for too.

Breast tissue has its own drainage map, and it's worth working with a therapist trained in breast and post-surgical lymphatic care.

02

Your recovery timeline

WHEN	WHAT'S TYPICAL	HOW WE SUPPORT YOU
Week 1	Tight, high, sore. Surgical bra 24/7.	Rest and gentle breathing. Pre-op session if booked.
Weeks 1–3	Swelling in chest and armpits, bruising fades	First session once your surgeon clears you
Weeks 3–6	Implants begin to settle, sides still puffy	Weekly sessions as needed
Months 2–6	Final shape emerges, scars maturing	Scar work once healed, with surgeon approval

03

Your Renu breast surgery plan

When to start: this varies more than most surgeries. Some surgeons welcome gentle drainage within the first week or two. Others prefer you wait until incisions are fully closed, often around 2–3 weeks. We follow your surgeon's timeline, always.

How many sessions?

- Augmentation: often 2–4 sessions, mainly for comfort
- Lift or reduction: often 4–6, more if liposuction was included
- Explant or en bloc: often 4–8, depending on swelling

Implant massage is separate. If your surgeon has prescribed implant displacement exercises, those are theirs to guide. Our work stays light, stays on the lymph pathways, and never moves or presses on the implant.

04

What a session feels like

You'll be comfortably supported and slightly reclined. Draping keeps you covered, and we only uncover the area we're working on.

We start with breathing and the neck, then clear the armpit nodes, then use feather-light strokes across the upper chest, sides and around (never on) the incisions. Most clients say the tightness eases noticeably by the end.

05

What we will never do

- Press on, push or move your implants
- Work on unhealed incisions
- Push fluid out of incisions
- Treat through signs of infection or a possible hematoma

06

At home between sessions

- ☐ Wear your surgical bra or compression exactly as prescribed
- ☐ Sleep propped up if your surgeon recommends it
- ☐ Gentle shoulder rolls and deep breathing
- ☐ No lifting or reaching overhead until cleared
- ☐ Avoid heat, hot tubs and saunas until your surgeon gives the okay

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL HELP

Call your surgeon if...

- One breast suddenly becomes much larger, harder or more painful than the other (possible hematoma)
- Fever over 38°C, chills or a racing heart
- Spreading redness, warmth or red streaks
- Cloudy or foul-smelling drainage, or an incision that opens
- Skin around the nipple or incisions darkens or turns dusky

08 · QUESTIONS

Your questions, answered

Is lymphatic massage safe with breast implants?

Yes, when it's done by a trained therapist with your surgeon's clearance. MLD is feather-light and works around the implant, not on it.

When can I get lymphatic drainage after breast augmentation?

It depends on your surgeon. Some allow it in the first two weeks, others prefer about 2–3 weeks once incisions are closed.

When can I get lymphatic drainage after breast reduction?

Often once incisions are closed, around 2–3 weeks, though some surgeons clear it sooner.

Why is swelling worse under my arms after breast surgery?

That's where most breast lymph drains. Fluid gathers along the side of the chest on its way to the armpit nodes.

Does lymphatic drainage help after implant removal?

Yes. Explant and en bloc capsulectomy can leave significant swelling, and gentle MLD can help it settle more comfortably.

Can lymphatic drainage prevent capsular contracture?

There isn't strong evidence that it does. Follow your surgeon's implant care instructions. MLD is for swelling and comfort.

WHY RENU

Not all "lymphatic massage" is the same.

After surgery, you're trusting someone with healing tissue. Here's what you get at Renu.

Led by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist with 10 years' experience. Our post-op and lymphedema program is led by Meeghan Mackenzie, RMT since 2005 and a Certified Lymphedema Therapist since 2016. Meeghan earned her CLT through the Academy of Lymphatic Studies' 135-hour Complete Lymphedema Certification, which covers Manual Lymph Drainage and Complete Decongestive Therapy, the same standard used to treat lymphedema after cancer. She is one of roughly 350 CLTs in Canada.

Trained in the world's leading lymphatic methods. Beyond her CLT, Meeghan has trained in:

- Vodder Manual Lymph Drainage, the original method developed by Dr. Emil Vodder and the foundation of lymphatic therapy worldwide
- Földi, the German school behind Complete Decongestive Therapy, named for the Földi Clinic in the Black Forest, one of Europe's leading lymphology centres
- Chikly Lymph Drainage Therapy, which teaches therapists to feel the rhythm, direction and depth of lymph flow, map pathways by hand, and work with scar tissue and fibrosis

That combination lets us choose the right approach for your body and your surgery, not a one-size-fits-all routine.

Over 20 years of hands-on experience, with a clinical focus on oncology, lymphedema and surgical recovery.

Registered Massage Therapy receipts for your extended health plan.

Honest care. We tell you what lymphatic work can do, what it can't, and when you need your surgeon instead.

What to look for in any post-op therapist:

- A regulated health licence (in Alberta, an RMT, physiotherapist, OT or nurse)
- Formal lymphatic or lymphedema certification, not a weekend course
- Light, comfortable technique. If it hurts, it isn't lymphatic drainage
- No pushing fluid out of incisions
- Clear, published pricing, and willingness to work with your surgeon

FOR YOU TO KEEP

My recovery notes

Bring this page to your sessions. It helps us plan your care around your surgeon's instructions.

PROCEDURE

SURGERY DATE

SURGEON AND CLINIC PHONE

CLEARED FOR LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE ON

COMPRESSION INSTRUCTIONS

SESSION DATE	HOW I'M FEELING · NOTES



GIVE FRESH LIFE OR STRENGTH TO.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Feeling tight and full after breast surgery?

We can help it feel lighter, and you'll stay covered and comfortable the whole time. Book at renu.janeapp.com, or call 403-270-2111 if you'd like to check timing with us first.

BOOK ONLINE

renu.janeapp.com

CALL

403-270-2111

VISIT

200, 209 19 St NW
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HOURS

Monday to Friday 8:00 am to 8:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

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This guide is general education to support your recovery. It doesn't replace the advice of your surgeon or medical team. Always follow your surgeon's instructions, and seek medical care for any of the warning signs listed in this guide.

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