



OHIO PLASTIC SURGERY SPECIALISTS

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How to Manage Your Drain

Why do I need a drain?

During your surgery tissue layers were separated from each other creating a space that could possibly fill with fluid. For normal healing to occur, these tissues must be in contact. Your drain safely removes this fluid from the space. As a surgical site heals, the size of this space gets smaller, and the amount of fluid produced in the wound decreases. Eventually the space closes completely and there is no fluid accumulation. The entire process may take only a few days or up to several weeks. Your drain is removed when your surgeon feels that the amount fluid collected over 24 hours is low enough to remove the device. That is why it is important for you to accurately record the drain amounts.

What are the drain parts?

Drains have 3 parts: the **drain**, the **drain tube**, and the **drain bulb**. The **drain** is a specially coated white tube that collects the fluid from your surgical site. You cannot see this part. The **drain tube** connects the drain to the drain bulb. This clear plastic tube carries the fluid from the drain to the bulb. The drain tube is normally anchored to your skin with a stitch near the incision. The **drain bulb** is a device that creates a vacuum pulling the drain fluid into it. This is the part that you will need to empty. Never detach the tubing from the bulb as this is a sterile one way environment.

There are many types of drains

All drains work on the same principle- Negative pressure. Be sure that the chamber is “charged.” This is done by collapsing the bulb with the vent open, holding it in a collapsed position reapply the stopper on the vent.

Can I take a shower with a drain?

Your surgeon will tell you if you may shower. On most occasions it is OK to shower. When you do take a shower with a drain in place, you should use a rope or belt around your waist or neck and pin the drains to this by their tabs. This will prevent inadvertent dislodging of the drains.

How often should I empty the drain?

In general, you should empty the drain bulbs two times every 24 hours or whenever the drain bulb fills up. Sometimes the bulb may need to be emptied more frequently. **Always record the amount of the drainage.** If you have more than one drain, record the output for each separately.

You may notice that as you move around more, that the drainage may increase. This is expected within reason. The color may change from dark red, to a thinner yellow fluid. You may also note some clots in the bulb. This is also expected. If you have questions, feel free to call your surgeon.

Do I need to do wound care at the site?

Usually not. An antibiotic disk is at the drain exit site and only needs changed once a week. If you have itching at the site or the site is too saturated/wet, then you may remove the disk and start daily dressing changes. This should be done with neosporin and dry gauze.

How should the tubing be positioned?

You should avoid kinking of the tubing to allow for fluid egress. If you had abdominal surgery and are wearing a binder, the tubing and bulb **SHOULD NOT** be under the binder as you can kill the skin from the pressure. If you had breast surgery, the tubing and bulb **SHOULD NOT** be under the bra.

How to Empty your Drain

You may want to proceed with the following steps in your bathroom with the sink and toilet nearby.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Hold the drain bulb upright and remove the stopper from the stem. The bulb will expand to an egg shape.
3. Hold the bulb over the measuring cup. Turn the bulb over with the stem over the cup. Gently squeeze the bulb to empty the drain fluid into the cup.
4. After emptying the drain, squeeze all of the air out of the bulb by grasping the bulb between your thumb fingers.
5. Continue to squeeze the bulb. With the bulb completely empty of air, replace the stopper into the drain stem. When you release your grip on the bulb, it will stay collapsed.
6. Secure the drain bulb back to your clothing.
7. Look at the amount of fluid that was emptied into the cup and write down that amount on the record sheet provided. Be sure to also write down the date and time that the drain was emptied.
8. Pour the fluid from the cup into the toilet or sink and flush the toilet or rinse the sink.
9. Repeat steps 2 to 8 for each drain if you have more than one drain.
10. Rinse out your cup(s) and wash your hands.

TIPS

- If you have more than one drain, always record each drain's amount in the same column each time.
- Write down the date and time prior to starting the process of emptying the drains.
- Empty drains at the same times each day.



