

## Caring for your Surgical Drains

Surgical drains are placed in order to remove excess fluid that the body produces as a result of surgery. The fluid produced is a combination of lymphatic fluid, blood cells, and bits of tissue. Removing this fluid results in more efficient healing and reduces the risk of infection.

The amount of fluid produced is directly related to the extent of the surgical procedure. The more extensive the procedure, the greater the amount of fluid. The color of the fluid is initially cranberry in color (blood-tinged) but eventually becomes light pink or yellow. The more active you are, the greater the amount of fluid produced. Increased activity can cause the color of the fluid to become cranberry after it has been yellow.

Your surgical drains are attached to a soft, plastic bulb, or reservoir (see Figure 1). The drain is placed into your surgical site through a small opening near your incision. This area is called the insertion site. A suture (stitch) will hold it in place. The rest of the tubing will extend outside your body and will be attached to the bulb. When the bulbs are compressed (squeezed) with the stopper in place, a constant gentle suction is created. The bulbs should be compressed at all times to facilitate drainage from the surgical site.

The length of time you will have your drains depends on your surgery and the amount of drainage you are experiencing. Each patient's experience is different. Some patients drain a lot; others only a little. In general, drains are typically removed when the output of each drain is <30 mL over a 24 hour period.

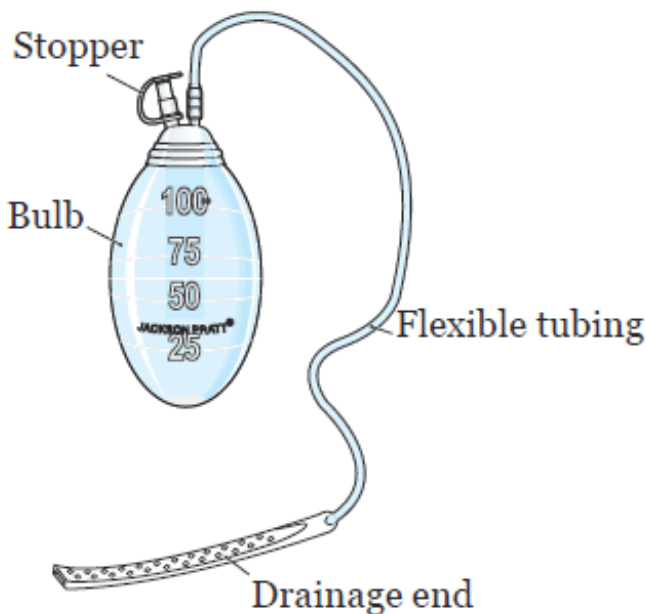


Figure 1.

## **Drain Care Instructions**

Meticulous drain care is **critical** in the prevention of post-op infection. Please use excellent hand hygiene and wash your hands before & after you have performed your drain care.

### **Step 1: Stripping your drains**

“Stripping” your drains helps to move fluid and tissue through down the tubing towards the bulb and keeps the drainage flowing. Strip the tubing **before** opening the stopper to empty and record your output.

1. **WASH YOUR HANDS!** Wet your hands, apply soap, rub them together for 15-20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet. If you are using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, cover your hands with it, rubbing them together until they are dry.
2. With your dominant hand, pinch the tubing with your thumb and index finger as it exits from beneath the dressing. Keep this hand steady while you strip the drain. This will ensure that you are not tugging on your skin, which can be painful.
3. With the thumb and index of your remaining hand, pinch the tubing right below your steady hand. Keeping your fingers pinched, slide them down the length of the drain. Hand sanitizer on the fingertips of your “stripping” hand is very helpful to allow stripping in one smooth motion.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for each drain.

### **Step 2: Emptying your drains**

Empty your drains three times a day. Record the amount of drainage from each drain and bring your drain record with you to each appointment. If you have more than one drain, make sure to measure and write down the drainage of each drain separately. Do not add them together.

1. If the drainage bulb is attached to your surgical bra or drain belt, unfasten it.
2. Unplug the stopper on top of the bulb. This will cause the bulb to expand.  
Do not touch the inside of the stopper.
3. Turn the bulb upside down and gently squeeze it. Empty the drainage into the measuring cup (see Figure 2).
4. Turn the bulb right-side-up. Squeeze the bulb tightly and replace the stopper.
5. Make sure that the bulb stays fully compressed to ensure a constant, gentle suction.



Figure 2. Emptying the bulb

### Step 3: Recording your drains

1. Record the drainage amount of each drain on your drain log. The first few days following surgery, the fluid may be dark red in color. This is normal. As you continue to heal, it will lighten to a pink or yellow.
2. Flush the drainage down the toilet and rinse the measuring cup with water.
3. Secure each drain to your surgical bra or drain belt. Do not allow the drain “dangle.” It is also acceptable to safety pin the drain tabs to the outside waistband of your pants. **DO NOT** tuck the drains into the waistband of your pants or undergarments. This is not considered hygienic and can increase your risk of infection.
4. Bring your drain log with you to EACH post-op appointment.