The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information

Going home following breast implant surgery

This factsheet explains what you should be aware of following your breast implant surgery and who you should contact should you have any concerns.

Looking after your wounds

- Dressings are placed over your breasts immediately after surgery - these stay on until your first outpatient appointment
- You may shower with the dressings on, but do not soak in the bath
- Pat dressings dry or dry them with a cool hair dryer, being careful not to burn your skin (you will experience reduced sensation to the skin at this stage)
- All your stitches will be absorbable - your wounds will be checked at your outpatient appointment
- We advise you to sleep on your back with a couple of pillows for two weeks, as this eases any stress or tension on your wounds. Try to prop yourself up using a couple of pillows to make sure you are comfortable.

We recommend that you wear a sports bra the morning after your surgery - this should be worn day and night for 4–6 weeks and only taken off to shower. Underwired bras will irritate the scars and should be avoided for three months following your surgery.

Your scars will improve within a few months of surgery. They may be a little more pink and noticeable, even red and lumpy temporarily, before they start to fade. Scars may stay pink for up to nine months before they fade properly. Protect scars from sunlight or any ultraviolet (UV) light until they have completely faded by applying a total sun block to the affected area when exposed. Your outpatients nurse will explain how best to minimise scarring at your follow up appointment. Scars usually become fully mature and fade 12–18 months after an operation.

You may find it difficult to apply deodorant in the first few weeks due to change of sensation and/or numbness. There is no research evidence suggesting you should not use deodorant, so this is a matter of personal preference.

Possible problems following surgery

Seroma (common occurrence)
Following surgery, the body produces excess fluid (serous fluid). Wound drains can help remove some of this excess fluid. When the drain is removed, the fluid may still form and produce a

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swelling around the wound or under the arm. This swelling is known as a seroma. A seroma is not a serious problem and it will reduce with time. Occasionally, the body can produce a large amount of fluid which can make the area quite swollen. Dealing with a seroma is never an emergency. Generally nothing needs to be done unless you are particularly uncomfortable. Please inform your nurse if this happens.

Wound infection (rare occurrence)
This can happen after any operation. Usually the wound becomes red, hot and painful. You may feel generally unwell and have a raised body temperature. Please contact us if this occurs, as you may need a review or a prescription for antibiotics.

Bruising (very common)
Bruising is very common after breast surgery as the breast has a very good blood supply. Bruising may appear some days after the surgery. Generally nothing needs to be done as it improves over a period of a few weeks.

Haematoma (rare occurrence)
A haematoma is a collection of blood around the wound area. It is caused by bleeding from a small blood vessel within the wound. If this happens, it will usually be within 24 hours of surgery, although occasionally it can happen up to 14 days later. A haematoma can be quite firm to touch and blood may ooze from the wound. If this happens, you may need to return to theatre to have the collection of blood removed. If you have been discharged from hospital, you should seek medical attention urgently by contacting The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline.

Pain (common)
There is usually discomfort following surgery, rather than pain. Surgery to the armpit can be more uncomfortable than the breast itself. Simple pain relief tablets or anti-inflammatory tablets (if these are suitable for you) taken on a regular basis should be sufficient to relieve the discomfort. Pain management is much easier if treated earlier rather than later. If you are struggling, please contact us; the details are at the end of this factsheet.

Change in sensation and numbness (common)
During surgery, some of the nerves may be cut or bruised. You may become aware of numbness, loss of sensation or heightened sensation around the operation site, at the side of your chest or the area near your armpit. This is quite normal and usually improves with time.

Recovering from your surgery
When you leave the hospital, you should rest and ease yourself gently back into your daily routine as you feel able. You must remember that you have had major surgery and that your body is still recovering from the effects of the anaesthetic as well as the surgery itself.

In the early days following your operation, your body will need a vast amount of 'internal' energy to repair itself. This leaves you with small amounts of energy for the rest of the day. Your body will dictate your level of activity. After each activity you carry out, you may find your energy levels dipping and you may need a rest while your body recovers – this is normal.

As the days and weeks pass, your energy store will increase. After 6–12 weeks, you will have returned to your normal daily pattern. During this time, you may find you have a good day when

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you appear to have lots of energy. This may be followed by a couple of days when you feel tired and sometimes tearful - this is normal.

Smoking
You are advised not to smoke after your operation as this will increase the risk of complications occurring.

Sex and intimacy
There are no restrictions from a medical point of view. Coping with breast cancer and its treatment can be physically and psychologically demanding, and you may well feel tired. You may not feel any desire for sex for a while - this is quite normal. If you wish to talk to a specialist nurse in confidence, please ask.

Possible complications

If you experience any of the following, please contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:

- Signs of redness around your wound area
- Feeling generally unwell with fever
- Odour coming from the wounds
- A burning sensation around the wounds
- Increasing pain and swelling or bleeding at the site of the operation
- Leak from the wound which may be an odorous green/yellow fluid (pus).

Contact details

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week

Alternatively, please contact your Clinical Nurse Specialist if any problems occur or if you would like further advice:

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Plastic Surgery

Chelsea:	020 7811 8318	(NHS)
	020 352 8171 Ex 1573	(Private care)
Sutton:	020 352 8171 Ex 4345	(NHS and Private care)

Clinical Nurse Specialist, Breast

Chelsea:	020 7811 8549	(NHS and Private care)
Sutton:	020 8661 3027	(NHS)
	020 8661 3967	(Private care)

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