Post-operative advice after breast surgery
Information for patients

This information leaflet will provide you with specific post-operative advice following your breast surgery. It is essential for you to have an adult with you for the first 24 hours when discharged to help with your assist with your needs as required.

Binder
This is a stretchy material with a Velcro fastening down the front that is worn around the chest area. Its function is to help reduce swelling and bruising.

You will wake up after your operation wearing a binder. It should be worn day and night for 48 hours and then removed. We do not need it back as it is a single use item. It is advisable to wear a non-underwired bra / sports bra for at least two weeks after your operation to minimise discomfort and pressure to the breast tissue whilst the area is healing.

If you have a drain the binder should stay on whilst the drain is in place and then for an additional 24 hours after the drain has been removed.

Please do not get rid of the binder until you are seen in clinic in case we ask you to put it back on.

If you have had a mastectomy and develop a collection of fluid around the mastectomy site (known as a seroma - a normal side-effect of this surgery) then you may be advised to wear it a bit longer by either the consultant or breast clinical nurse specialist (CNS). The binder could cause some rubbing to the skin and should be removed if it does. Occasionally a pad is placed between your skin and the binder to promote your comfort.

The binder does contain natural rubber latex. Please advise your consultant or CNS if you have a latex allergy.
**Post-surgical bra**
This is a surgical bra with eyelets and a front zip fastening. The purpose of the surgical bra is to support the reconstructed breast and help maintain its shape.

If you have had a mammoplasty or reconstruction, you will have a surgical support bra and not a binder. You will wake up with this on after your operation. You will usually be given a spare support bra so you have one to wear and one to wash once you are at home. It should remain on until your post-op follow-up in clinic. It can be removed whilst washing however the dressings should not be removed and the operation site must be kept dry. The hospital does not need it back as it is a single use item.

**Non-under wired / sports bra**
This should be worn after the binder has been removed.

If you have had a mastectomy you will have been given a softie (temporary breast form to fit in your bra) by the CNS. At your post-op follow-up appointment, you will be offered an appointment for approximately six weeks after surgery for a permanent silicone prosthesis fitting. At this appointment you will be fitted with a free post-surgical bra and prosthesis. The clinics are held on alternate Tuesdays at East Surrey Hospital and Crawley Hospital.

**Wound care / stitches and dressings**
Stiches to the operation site are placed under the skin and are dissolvable. The operation site will be covered with steri-strips. Depending on your surgeon an additional adhesive dressing will may be placed over the top. The dressing should be left intact, kept dry and not be removed. It is not uncommon that a small amount of discharge from the operation is seen on the dressing. However, if you feel that the discharge is heavy, offensive or bright red or causing irritation you should contact your CNS who will give you further advice.

Bruising post-surgery is normal and the amount varies per individual. The operation site will need time to recover from any bruising and swelling. If your wound has healed without any complications non-perfumed moisturising cream e.g. Aqueous or E45 can be applied daily to the scar area as this can help to soften and smooth the scar. We do not recommend using antiseptic creams e.g. Sudocreme and Germolene.

It is preferable to use hair removing creams or lady razors if you have had an axillary node clearance to reduce trauma to the healing wound area.
Blood tests and blood pressure checks
If you have had multiple lymph nodes removed from your armpit area (Axillary Node Dissection) it is advised not to have blood tests or blood pressures taken on that arm. It is advisable to inform medical staff if these investigations are needed.

Personal hygiene
A high waist shower or strip wash is advised initially post-op.

Deodorant use is restricted to the non-operated armpit only until you have been seen and advised in the post-op follow-up clinic that the wound site has healed sufficiently.

It is normal to experience numbness in the operated armpit and therefore take caution when shaving as you may not be aware you have cut yourself shaving. Shaving should not be done until you have had your post-op follow-up appointment and advised when to resume this.

Pain relief
Everyone is different however most people experience some discomfort after the operation. If you have had surgery under the armpit this can be more uncomfortable than the operation site on the breast. You may experience tenderness, numbness to the back of the upper arm and some strange sensations in the armpit and arm. These are all normal after surgery.

You may have little or no discomfort or pain. However it is advisable to take regular pain relief for the first few days as required. The hospital usually sends you home with co-codamol tablets which contain paracetamol and codeine. Codeine can be constipating so please be mindful if taking them to ensure your diet is balanced and fluid intake is reasonable to help avoid constipation. Some people experience light headiness or mild nausea due to the codeine. If you experience this it is advisable to use regular paracetamol and Ibuprofen (if you can take Ibuprofen). If you are allergic to codeine or have a sensitivity to it then please inform the ward staff so they can arrange for an alternative pain relief to be prescribed. Regular paracetamol / Ibuprofen can be effective however paracetamol should not be taken if taking co-codamol.

Drains
If you have been discharged with a drain(s) you will be supported at home by SASH@home (surgical nursing team) for those at home with drains. They will visit you at home daily to monitor the drainage and remove them once the drainage is a certain amount within 24 hours. The drain is held in with a
single stitch and is removed prior to removal. It can be uncomfortable. Most drains stay in between
two and seven days depending on your surgery.

If you have had a reconstruction, the consultant will advise if the drain should remain in for longer
despite the amount of drainage.

A material drainage bag cover will be provided for transporting the drain around.

**Post-op exercises**

When discharged home you will be wearing the support stockings designed to reduce any risk of
thrombosis due to the anaesthetic and immobility. These can be removed once you are walking
around as you were pre-operatively. If you are immobile due to medical or other reasons it would be
wise to wear them until seen in the post-op follow up clinic where the nurses can advise you further.
Stockings can be removed daily to enable you to wash your legs. It is advisable to have someone to
help remove and replace the stockings to avoid strain to your operation site.

You will be given a leaflet on post-op arm exercises that your CNS will go through with you. These
are gentle exercises aimed at insuring you have good arm and shoulder movements after your
operation to reduce the risk of shoulder stiffness developing after breast surgery.

**Driving**

We advise you not to drive until you have had your post-op follow-up with the Consultant as you will
not be covered by your insurance company.

**Post-op follow-up appointment**

Follow-up appointments are approximately 10 -14 days after surgery. The appointment letters will
either be given to you on your day of surgery or sent to your home address. If you have not received
a letter within 7 days after your surgery, please contact your consultant’s secretary.

**Resuming daily activities**

It is not uncommon to feel more tired initially after your operation. It is advisable to avoid heavy
household chores e.g. hoovering, ironing and lifting heavy objects for a minimum of 2 weeks and
possibly up to 6 weeks depending on your surgery.
**Resuming intimacy and sex**

This is variable person to person and may depend on what surgery you have had as to how comfortable and confident you feel about resuming intimacy and sex. Pain / discomfort / numbness and possible altered body image after surgery are normal. If you have had chemotherapy prior to surgery you may still be recovering from some of the effects of chemotherapy especially fatigue, body image and possible menopausal related symptoms.

**Sick certificate for work**

You can self-certificate for the first five working days. If you require a sick certificate this can be given on the day of your admission.

Please see your GP if you require additional time off after your certificate has expired.

**Post-op concerns or queries**

If you have any queries/concerns, please contact the breast clinical nurse specialists during working hours Monday-Friday (except bank holidays).

**East Surrey Hospital**

Liz or Chris
Tel: 01737 768 511 x6688

**Crawley Hospital**

Sue or Jan
Tel: 01293 600 300 x3238

If you have any concerns out of hours please call either:

- Your GP
- NHS 111
- Urgent treatment centre at Crawley Hospital
- Emergency department at East Surrey Hospital

**In an emergency please call 999.**

**Secretaries – appointment related queries**

**Mandy Bennett**
(Miss Waheed’s secretary)
Tel: 01737 768 511 x1746

**Gill Dunstan**
(Mr Suleiman’s / Miss Naseem’s secretary)
Tel: 01293 600 300 x3238
Useful resources
Breast unit page on the SASH website
www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/our-services/a-z-of-services/breast-unit/

Breast cancer care
www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Breast unit
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk
East Surrey Hospital
Canada Avenue
Redhill
Surrey RH1 5RH
Tel: 01737 768 511

Crawley Hospital
West Green Drive
Crawley
West Sussex RH11 7DH
Tel: 01293 600 300

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
Telephone: 01737 231 958
Email: pals@sash.nhs.uk
Write to: PALS, East Surrey Hospital
Redhill, Surrey RH1 5RH

You can also ask a member of staff to contact PALS on your behalf.

This information can be made available in other languages and formats, including larger text.
Contact: 01737 231 958 for help.

Author: Senior breast clinical nurse specialist
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