

## General advice for going home after breast surgery - Conquest Hospital patients

### Introduction

Recovery after surgery involves healing, both physically and emotionally, and the time this takes varies from person to person. There is no right or wrong way just whatever works for you as an individual.

Going home can bring mixed emotions. You may feel relief that the operation is over but concern about what comes next, results appointments and possible treatments. You may feel isolated or insecure because you no longer have the immediate support of the hospital team. If you have any concerns or questions don't hesitate to contact the **Macmillan Breast Care Nurse Specialists for advice or information by telephone or email (see below)**. **If you have any concerns regarding your surgery please contact the Enhanced Recovery (ERAS) Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery on 0300 131 4500 Ext: 147269**. Always remember to leave a message on the answer phone with as much information as possible as the Macmillan / ERAS office is not always staffed as they are frequently out seeing patients.

You may also call Breast Cancer Care's free phone helpline on 0808 800 60 00 or Macmillan Cancer Support on 0808 808 00 00 for general cancer information and support.

### Wound Care (please refer to the section for your consultant)

#### Miss Shah

If you have had a mastectomy, wide local excision, excision of a lump, excision of nipple ducts, sentinel node biopsy or axillary clearance **you will need to make an appointment with your practice nurse approximately two weeks post surgery for removal of dressings and wound check**. All sutures used are dissolvable although at two weeks they may not have dissolved yet. If you or the practice nurse can feel any suture knots protruding from the skin, please do not be alarmed. This can be reviewed in your post operative appointment.

If you have had breast reconstruction, revision of a reconstruction, revision or replacement of implants, breast augmentation, breast reduction, therapeutic mammoplasty, round block excision, vertical mammoplasty or nipple reconstruction, your dressings and steristrips should stay on until you are reviewed in the outpatient clinic. You will receive specific instructions on discharge. **In many cases you will also be required to wear a support bra night and day for 4 to 6 weeks, and this will be discussed with you before discharge from hospital**. If you have a tissue expander in place you will be provided with a small magnet to bring with you to your clinic appointments. If you have had nipple reconstruction, you will be provided with a tube of Chloramphenicol ointment to bring with you to your clinic appointment.

If you have had a nipple tattoo, please follow Miss Shah's instructions and soak off the dressings carefully in the bath or shower, and apply Chloramphenicol Ointment once daily, supplied on discharge, for one week. Very rarely, some people can be allergic to the skin pigments used for tattoos, if you think you have had an allergic reaction please see your GP urgently. Nipple tattoo patients are not routinely followed up in clinic.

Your follow up appointment in the breast clinic will be sent to you by Miss Shah's secretary; this is normally 2 to 3 weeks after your operation.

If you are concerned or have questions please contact the ERAS Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery for advice.

### **Mr Subramanian**

If you have had a mastectomy, wide local excision, excision of a lump, excision of nipple ducts, sentinel node biopsy or axillary clearance **you will need to make an appointment with your practice nurse approximately two weeks post surgery for removal of dressings and wound check.** All sutures used are dissolvable although at two weeks they may not have dissolved yet. If you or the practice nurse can feel any suture knots protruding from the skin, please do not be alarmed. This can be reviewed in your post operative appointment.

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Your follow up appointment in the breast clinic will be sent to you by Mr Subramanian's secretary; this is normally 2 to 3 weeks after your operation.

If you are concerned or have questions please contact the ERAS Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery for advice.

### **Post-operative instructions related to both consultants**

- **Please wear anti-embolism stockings for 7 to 14 days post- surgery, day and night unless there is a medical reason.** Your Enhanced Recovery Specialist Nurse / Ward staff will inform you of how long you will need to wear them for.
- If you have had a **wide, local excision you are advised to wear your bra day and night for 1 to 2 weeks for extra support**, (this can be a bra which contains an underwire as long as it doesn't rub the surgical site, in this case a bra without a wire is more suitable).
- If you have had any surgery under your arm pit, **it is important that you start doing your exercises to help you get back the range of movement in your affected arm. These should be started the day after surgery** (please check your primary breast cancer resource pack)
- You are advised not to use any creams or bio-oil until you have discussed this with your individual Consultant / Registrar when reviewed in your out patients appointment.
- Once your dressings are removed and your wound is completely healed you may bath and shower as normal.

### **Patients going home with drains**

You will be referred to the community district nursing team for management of the drain. The team will visit you at home the day after you are discharged home from hospital where you will be assessed daily until your drains are removed. Some people find the removal of drains uncomfortable, you may wish to take some painkillers prior to this procedure taking place. **If any swelling occurs once the drain is removed please following the instructions in the seroma section below.**

## Breast Prostheses

If you have had a mastectomy, you may wish to wear a permanent silicone, prostheses which can be fitted six weeks after your surgery. **For this to be arranged you need to contact surgical appliances for an appointment on extension 8547.**

## Complications that can occur following surgery

### Wound Infection

It is unlikely that you will get a wound infection after your breast surgery but it is important to know what to look for. Any of the following symptoms could mean you have an infection:

- The wound feels tender, swollen, warm to touch, redness in the area
- Discharge from the wound
- Feeling generally unwell with a raised temperature
- If you have any of these symptoms please get an emergency appointment with your GP or out of hours service (e.g. NHS 111). Please leave a message on the answer phone of the Enhanced Recovery Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery on 0300 131 4500 Ext: 147269 to update them on the situation but do NOT wait for a return call before contacting your doctor.

Your scar line will be swollen and bruised and feel hard to the touch these are all signs of the healing process so try not to touch your wound excessively as this can lead to a wound infection. We understand that touching scars assists individual patients to adapt psychologically to their altered body image and that its an important part of the healing process.

### Bleeding from the wound site

In the first 24 to 48 hours after surgery, especially if you have gone home as a day case, if you notice any fresh bleeding from the wound site, which is large in amount and soaks through the whole dressings, please contact ERAS Specialist nurse or Gardner Ward if this happens in the daytime, or attend the Emergency Department if at night-time. **Significant bleeding requiring hospital attendance happens very rarely.**

### Seroma

Sometimes once the drain has been removed a collection of fluid can develop in the breast or under arm area. This is called a seroma which is not a serious issue. This is normal fluid which the body has not yet found an alternative way of draining. A seroma can be described as “feeling like your carrying a golf ball or cricket ball under your arm or around the Mastectomy scar” remember this is harmless, so please do not be alarmed. A seroma is normally re absorbed over a period of time but can take several weeks or months. If it is causing a lot of pain or discomfort it may need to be drained. This is a simple procedure which can be done as an outpatient, it is not usually painful and it is not a medical emergency. If you are concerned about any swelling please contact your Enhanced Recovery Specialist Nurse and she will arrange for your seroma to be drained. **You only need to be reviewed by GP or the Emergency Department if you start to feel unwell and the area (seroma/ swelling) is red and inflamed.**

If you develop a large amount of swelling within 24 to 48 hours of the drain being removed and start to feel unwell it is important that you are reviewed.

### Any Problems

Any problems related to your surgery please contact the following:

- First point of access: The Eras Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery (I am available: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, please leave a message, your call will be returned (Mobile: 07971 131913 or 0300 131 4500 extension 147269).
- Second point of access: Is the Macmillan Breast Care Nurse Specialist and GP.
- Third point of access: You can contact Gardner Ward for advice – Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 148448. **Gardner SAU is to be called only out of hours in the evening or at Weekends**
- If you are having problems getting hold of the Eras Specialist Nurse or Macmillan Breast Care Nurse please update your Consultant secretary of any problems (Miss Shah's secretary: extension 148655 or Mr Subramanian's secretary: extension 148470).

## How soon will I be able to resume normal activities?

Once you get home from hospital, you can try to do a little more physical activity each day. Try not to set yourself enormous tasks and remember to rest between them; your body needs time and energy to recover. You should be able to return to most of your normal activities within a few weeks of your operation but this will vary from person to person and it is helpful to take things gently at first try to avoid strenuous housework such as vacuuming, ironing or carrying heavy shopping for the first 1 or 2 weeks. You may have more discomfort and stiffness as you begin to move your arm more and become more active. This usually improves naturally over time. Eating well will also help your body recover and your wound to heal and a healthy balanced diet is recommended.

## When will I be able to drive?

Depending on the type of surgery you have had you may be advised to avoid driving for between one and four weeks. It is important to wait for your wound to heal before you start driving and if you have a large amount of swelling allowing this to resolve first may make driving easier and more comfortable. It is important that before you start driving again you feel safe and confident that you can handle your car in the event of an emergency. It is advisable to start with short journeys and may be useful to have a companion with you at first. Breast surgery does not exempt you from wearing a seatbelt and this may be uncomfortable. To alleviate this you may try using a small thin cushion or placing extra padding around the seatbelt or purchasing a seatbelt clip (available from motoring stores). You may also want to check with your insurance provider that you are covered.

## When can I return to work?

How soon you return to work will vary depending on your job and any follow on treatments you require as well as your progress recovering from your surgery. Most people will usually require at least four to eight weeks off work and then will be able to reassess the situation as more information becomes available. If you feel you want to return to work earlier than this and are feeling fit and well then you can.

## Follow up care

Your follow up appointment in the breast clinic will be sent to you; this is normally two to six weeks after your operation. This appointment is to discuss your histology results and begin the discussions of future treatment you may need.

Follow up care will at regular intervals and further information can be found in the 'Follow up schedule - following treatment for breast cancer' leaflet, which you can get from the Macmillan Breast Care Nurse Specialists or from the Nurses in the out patients breast clinic.

## Sources of information

More information can be found in the following leaflets and booklets, which you may have been given:

**Advice for patients discharged home with a drain following surgery to the breast and/or axilla** – East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust – supplied if you are discharged with a drain in.

**Your Operation and Recovery** – Breast Cancer Care

**Reducing the risk of lymphoedema** – Breast Cancer Care - supplied if you have had lymph glands removed

Breast Cancer Care: Free phone helpline: 0808 800 60 00

Macmillan Cancer Support: Free phone helpline: 0808 808 00 00

## Contact numbers

If you have any questions/concerns following your discharge from hospital, please contact the following:

**Monday to Friday – 9.00am to 5.00pm (Excluding Bank Holidays and weekends)**

### Macmillan Breast Care Nurse Specialists:

Louise Hunter – Tel: 0300 131 4834 Ext: 734834 or email: [louise.hunter5@nhs.net](mailto:louise.hunter5@nhs.net)

Juliette Twyman – Tel: 0300 131 4833 Ext: 734833 or email: [Juliette.twyman@nhs.net](mailto:Juliette.twyman@nhs.net)

Debbie Turnbull – Tel: 0300 131 4833: Ext: 734833 or email: [Debbie.turnbull1@nhs.net](mailto:Debbie.turnbull1@nhs.net)

Secretary to Miss Shah: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 148655

Secretary to Mr Subramanian: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 148515

### Enhanced Recovery Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery:

Connie Bowyer: Tel. 0300 131 4500 Ext: 147269 or Mobile: 07971 131913

### Out of Hours:

Conquest Patients : Your GP, NHS 111, and Gardner ward.

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 734731 or by email at: [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net)

## Hand Hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other Formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

Tel: 0300 131 4500 Email: [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The Conquest and Eastbourne breast multidisciplinary teams have been consulted and agreed this information.

Next review date: August 2023  
Responsible clinician/author: Connie Bowyer (Eras Specialist Nurse in Breast Surgery).

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