

Postoperative checklist for patients undergoing Breast Surgery



James Paget
University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Author: Laura Smith, Physician Associate, Breast Surgery

This leaflet provides general post-operative advice for patients undergoing Breast or Axilla surgery under the Breast Team.

Pain relief

During your surgery you will be given pain relief by your anaesthetist and local anaesthetic in the site of the surgery to minimise short term post-operative discomfort. This will wear off therefore it is important to take regular pain relief. You will be discharged home with pain relief medications and advised when to take them and when to take over the counter pain relief.

Further information: 'Pain control after Breast Surgery' available on the James Paget website.

Dressings

Your surgeon will have a preference to which dressings they use, we normally advise you on what to expect before your surgery.

- Waterproof adhesive dressings and/or steri-strips (please leave in place until your wound check appointment).
- Surgical glue and/or micropore tape (glue is shower proof, please leave tape in place until your wound check appointment but if this falls off prior to your appointment do not worry).
- Post-operative pads (you may have a soft pad to prevent friction on your wound, please remove this if it becomes dirty to reduce the risk of infection).
- PICO negative pressure dressings (your surgeon may decide to use a battery powered suction dressing, we have a separate information leaflet available for patients on our website).

Corset

After your surgery most patients will be advised to wear a surgical corset for up to 10 – 14 days (or longer if advised) around their chest. This aims to reduce post-operative swelling and bruising by providing compression. This should be firm but not restrictive.

The material can rub especially under the underarm, therefore, we recommend you wear a cotton t-shirt or vest underneath your corset to help minimise this. The corset has Velcro down the front therefore can be removed to have a shower and then replaced. If you have a support post operative bra this may be advised instead.

Monitoring operation site

It is very important you monitor your operation site for any complications. Please inspect your breast and/or armpit daily for signs of infection, swelling or poor healing. If you notice any of the below please contact the Breast Care Nurses as soon as possible:

- Redness, pain, oozing of operation site.
- Increased fluid under the scar (seroma or blood formation).
- Significant bruising of the skin.
- Blistering, bleeding or itchiness around the dressing site.

There is a small risk of a haematoma developing (bleeding after your surgery). Please monitor your wound and if you notice a sudden swelling/pain/bruising accompanied with feeling

generally unwell (faint, dizzy, nauseated) contact 999 or attend the Emergency Department immediately.

Showering

It is safe to shower as soon as you feel able to do so. Please remove your corset and keep your back to the shower (avoiding water directly onto the operation area). Please do not use soap or perfumed products near your scar. After showering please pat the area dry.

If you do not have a shower, bathe without submerging your scar. Please be careful not to strain whilst getting in/out of the bath as this can cause pressure on your scars.

Compression stockings and blood thinners

You will most likely be given a single injection of a blood thinner prior to going home to thin your blood and reduce the risk of blood clots. It is not routine to be sent home on injections unless you have a pre-existing medical condition but you will be advised if this is indicated. If you are already taking blood thinners your clinician will advise you when to restart these.

You may also be given TED compression stockings to wear to reduce the risk of blood clots in your legs (deep vein thrombosis) following your surgery. Please keep these on for one week. It is important to keep mobile and drink plenty of water to reduce your risk.

If you develop swelling, redness and/or pain in one/both of your legs please go straight to the Emergency Department.

If you develop sudden shortness of breath please go straight to the Emergency Department.

Exercises

If you are undergoing surgery for Breast Cancer, a Breast Care Nurse will visit you on the Day care ward before or after your surgery and provide you with an exercise leaflet (Breast Cancer Now). These are gentle exercises to help you recover from your surgery and importantly maintain shoulder movement. We advise no heavy lifting or overstretching for around 6 weeks or until advised to do so by your Breast Surgeon.

Post-operative Bras

During early post-operative recovery (around six weeks) it is very important to keep your breasts supported to help with the healing process. The process of scar maturation can take 12 months therefore continued support is important. If you have time prior to surgery we recommend that you get measured by a bra fitter. Your breast will be swollen for a few weeks after your operation, therefore, we recommend to get a few sizes to try. You will be advised when to change from your corset to post operative/firm sports bra. There are specific post-operative brands but also common retailers/supermarkets are alternative options.

Finding the most suitable bra:

- Front fastening (avoids overstretching your arm)
- Seamless (avoids rubbing on your scar)
- Wide band
- Adjustable shoulder straps

Skin care

Following your surgery please do not use any moisturisers or deodorants near the wound. When you attend for your wound check appointment your clinician will advise you when to start moisturising your scar (usually around the two week mark if you are healing well). We recommend gentle

non-perfumed moisturiser initially. When applying please gently massage your whole breast, underarm and upper arm. We recommend that you continue to do this long term.

Driving

We would recommend not driving for at least two weeks after your surgery. It is important that you feel safe to perform emergency manoeuvres and to wear a seat belt as normal before you recommence driving. Please contact your insurance company to check their regulations.

Your expected wound check appointment date:

We are available via telephone if you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Contact Numbers

Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm:

Breast Care Nurses 01493 452447

Breast Secretaries
01493 453680 (Professor Down, Mr Leeper)
01493 452236 (Mrs Downey)

The Trust will record your personal information to support your healthcare, in accordance with the NHS Care Record Guarantee.

The James Paget University Hospital is a smoke free zone. Smoking is not allowed in the buildings, grounds or car park.

Your Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.

Help us transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

OUR VALUES

Collaboration	We work positively with others to achieve shared aims
Accountability	We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan
Respect	We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride
Empowerment	We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement
Support	We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS

01493 453240