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For more information, contact a staff member on your
admitting ward (see accompanying letter)
on: 01384 - 456111 (then ask for ward)

AVAILABLE IN LARGE PRINT AND AUDIO VERSION
- CALL 01384 244065

Going Home After a Wide Local Excision of the Breast
This booklet is designed to provide you with some basic information following your operation. It also provides you with contact numbers if you need some help or advice.

Looking after your wound drains

These small plastic tubes are placed under the skin near the operation site. The fluid from the drains goes into a bag or bottle, and this helps to prevent complications developing later. It is likely that at least one drain will be removed in hospital and you may go home with the remaining drain(s) still in place. The ward nursing staff will make arrangements with you for it to be removed (usually 1-3 days later). The drains don’t need any special care; just avoid pulling them if you can.

Looking after your wound

The wound will be checked before you leave hospital. The stitches in most cases are dissolvable and will not need removing. When your last drain is removed, the nurse will put on a small dressing. You can remove this in 2 days time. All remaining dressings should be removed to assist with healing. You might find that as the bruising develops you become uncomfortable and sore. Painkillers such as paracetamol should be enough to take this uncomfortable feeling away.

It is quite normal for the arm, breast or chest wall to tingle, feel tight and be tender. This may persist for a few weeks after surgery. If your lymph nodes have been removed, you may have a numb feeling on the inside of the arm. Sometimes it
can be quite painful. It does improve with time, although some areas can occasionally remain numb. It is important that you do arm exercise after your operation to encourage a full range of movement back into your arm. These should be continued three times a day for at least six months. The Breast Care Nurses and the physiotherapist will give a leaflet explaining the exercises before you leave hospital.

Seromas

In the first weeks after surgery, some women experience a ‘seroma’, which is a collection of fluid usually along the scar line or in the armpit area. The fluid is quite harmless and eventually disperses by itself. If it forms a lump that limits your movement, we may remove some of the fluid using a syringe and needle. If you have any concerns please ring the Breast Care Nurses for advice.

Baths or showers

In the first 2-3 days after surgery, it does not matter if you splash your dressing but avoid soaking it. Once the dressings are removed, a daily bath or shower is advisable. Just avoid using perfumed soap or deodorants until your scar is well healed. Pat the skin dry afterwards.

Your emotions

It can be very frightening to know that you are going to have surgery for breast cancer, and it is often difficult to absorb all that is said to you at time this is discussed. Often your emotions are on a roller-coaster, and may range from anger and bitterness to sadness and distress.
There may be time when you feel distracted and unable to concentrate, or you may have difficulty sleeping. Feeling numb is also an emotional response, a self protective one which intends to shield you from deeper feelings that threaten and overwhelm you. All of these emotions are normal and may continue for some time. Expect to have a few days when you feel more ‘weepy’ than normal - this is to be expected and over a period of time this will become less and less frequent. Tears are a release mechanism within the body. You will find that you move through these emotions as part of the process of coming to terms with having cancer. If you feel that your moods continue and you would like to talk to someone about this, you may contact the Breast Care Nurses.

**What is a breast prosthesis?**

Partial breast prosthesis can be used to enhance the natural breast. If you feel unhappy about the shape or contour of your breast following your surgery, it is possible to fit a partial silicone prosthesis into your bra. If you have any concerns regarding this, please talk to the Breast Care Nurses.

**What clothes should I wear?**

This depends entirely upon how quickly the scar line heals and how you feel. Some women find that straight after the surgery anything that puts pressure on the healing wound is uncomfortable. So for up to 6 weeks after surgery you may find a bra too restrictive. You may prefer to wear a camisole, crop-top or seamless cotton vest whilst at home, and wear your bra when you go out. Just wear what you feel comfortable in.

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**Cancer Support**

The White House
10, Ednam Road
Dudley
DY1 1JX
Telephone 01384 231232, 238289
Answerphone 01384 456093
Fax 01384 459975
e-mail cansup@globalnet.co.uk

Provide a range of services including information/helpline, complimentary therapies, gentle exercise, yoga one to one counselling.
Services and facilities are provided free of charge

**National Support**

Breast Cancer Care
Kiln House
210 New Kings Road
London
SW6 4NZ
Helpline 0808 800 6000
Telephone 020 7384 2984
Fax 020 7384 3387

Provide telephone information/helpline, financial or practical help. Self-help support groups and nursing care.
Breast Care Nurses

The Breast Care Nurses are available 9-5pm, Monday to Friday. If you have any concerns over a weekend, please consult the ward where your operation was carried out. The Breast Care Nurses are based at:-

- Russells Hall Hospital,
  Dudley,
  West Midlands,
  DY1 2HQ

  Direct Line & Answerphone: 01384 244065

Useful organisations in the local area

Dudley Breast Cancer Support Group

Meets first Thursday of every month 10-12 noon

Ring the Breast Care Nurses for more details on 01384 244065

Should I rest or exercise?

You will probably feel tired, both emotionally and physically, after your operation. So take things slowly and build up to normal activity. Resting is important. However it is important to continue with the exercises you have been shown. This will help you get a full range of movement back in your shoulder. There is very little restriction on what you can and cannot do, but is it advisable to avoid heavy lifting (such as shopping bags or a vacuum cleaner) for about 6 weeks after the operation when your wound has fully healed. Some people find that swimming is a comfortable exercise once the wound has healed.

Should I drive?

It is best to avoid driving for 2-3 weeks. This allows the wound to heal and ensures that you are able to react in emergency situations without the fear of hurting your wound.

When should I go back to work?

This depends upon you, there are no right or wrong times. It depends on the type of work you do and how you feel in yourself. Most women take 3-5 weeks off work after surgery. If you ask on the ward, staff will give you a first sick note (medical certificate). Your GP will give you a final certificate so that you can return to work.
**When will I get the results of my operation?**

You will be given an outpatient appointment either before you leave the ward, or alternatively it will be sent through the post. This is usually 2-3 weeks from your operation date. At this appointment your results will be explained to you, and any further treatment will be discussed. You may want to write down any questions in preparation for this visit. Do not feel that you have to attend any appointment alone, you are very welcome to bring your husband, partner or a friend.

It is likely that your surgeon will want you to meet one of the oncologists (cancer specialists) who are part of the breast cancer team, to discuss any additional treatments that may be beneficial. A referral to the oncologist will be discussed with you at the time of your post-operative visit and you should be contacted with an appointment within 2-3 weeks.

**Lymphoedema**

This is a swelling condition seen when the lymphatic system is damaged or blocked. Following removal of the lymph nodes and/or radiotherapy, a small number of women may develop Lymphoedema of the arm, either immediately after surgery, within a few months of surgery, or indeed up to several years later.

**Important points about arm and hand care**

It is important for you to use your arm as normally as possible following surgery, and to continue your arm exercises for at least 6 months.

1) Avoid heavy lifting (such as shopping bags and vacuum cleaner)
2) When sitting in a chair relaxing, raise your arm on a pillow to reduce swelling.
3) Offer your other arm for all injections, taking of blood pressure or for any blood tests.
4) Wear gloves when gardening.
5) Wear gloves when washing up.
6) Use thimbles when sewing.
7) Use an electric shaver for shaving.
8) Avoid getting sunburn. Always wear a high factor sunscreen or block. Also use an insect repellent.
9) Moisturise hand and arm using any hand cream or aqueous cream to prevent breaks in dry skin.
10) Clean any cuts and scrapes well. Observe for inflammation and swelling. Notify your Doctor if an infection occurs and persists.

It is important that you continue to perform the arm exercises that you were shown in hospital.