

Going home after having a lumpectomy and axillary surgery

This leaflet explains more about returning to your everyday activities after your lumpectomy (also called a wide local excision) and axillary surgery. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

More information can also be found in **Your operation and recovery**, a booklet by Breast Cancer Care which will be given to you.

When can I leave hospital?

You don't normally need to stay in hospital overnight after your lumpectomy, unless you have also had all your lymph nodes removed (axillary clearance).

Following your operation you will normally go home either the same day or the next morning.

- If you go home the same day please arrange for someone with transport to collect you. If you use a taxi you must have someone with you. You should not go home on public transport.
- If you are going home the following morning you may use public transport but you must have someone with you.
- Gentle exercises will have been recommended to you if you have had any surgery under your arm (axilla). These will help with any stiffness.
- It may help to wear a supportive, non-wired bra, such as a sports bra, during the day for the first few days or weeks after your operation. It may also make you more comfortable to wear a supportive bra at night.

After I leave hospital

Most women who have a lumpectomy recover well after the operation.

You may have the following possible common problems after surgery:

- Bruising, which normally settles after a few weeks.
- Pain, which is more common under the axilla than in the breast itself. Take pain killers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen to help your pain and if these do not work let your breast care nurse or GP know.
- Swelling of the breast or under the arm can happen if fluid collects under your scar. This is called a seroma and the swelling will gradually go down in time.
- If a large amount of fluid makes your breast area and/or armpit (axilla) very swollen, your wound may become painful or tight. This may wake you up at night or stop you from doing your arm exercises. Contact us if this happens.
- It is normal to have a slight pulling feeling or sharp shooting pains around the wound area or for it to feel itchy or numb.

The **Your operation and recovery** booklet has more information about other less common problems that can happen after surgery.

Looking after my wound

Your wound has been closed with dissolving stitches that don't need to be removed. It is also covered with a light waterproof dressing which can be removed about seven days after surgery or at your next clinic visit.

Under the dressing are some thin pieces of tape called steristrips. The steristrips can be removed 10-14 days after surgery. They can be taken off in clinic or by yourself in the shower to make it easier.

You can take a brief shower after your surgery as soon as you feel ready to. Gently dry the wound area with a soft towel. Try not to soak your top dressing and if it does get wet put on a new one. Don't use perfumed soaps or cream around the wound for the first few weeks.

Contact your breast care nurse or GP if the wound area becomes red, swollen or painful or you have a temperature as it could be a sign of infection.

Drain care

Drains take blood and fluid away from the wound to try and prevent swelling.

A lumpectomy does not normally need a drain, but you may need one if all your lymph nodes have been removed.

If you have a drain the nurses on the ward will tell you how to look after it at home.

Will I be in pain?

You may have mild discomfort, or more pain if all the lymph nodes under the arm have been removed.

If you have pain it can normally be controlled by pain killers at home.

Tell your doctor or nursing team if you have pain so we can adjust your pain relief to make sure you are comfortable.

Taking the right pain relief in the right amount will make it easier for you to do the arm exercises we give you to help with any stiffness.

Will I need to do any specific exercises?

We will give you a separate booklet to help with your arm exercises.

When can I get back to normal activities?

It normally takes two - four weeks to fully recover from your operation.

Avoid the following straight after surgery:

- driving
- lifting heavy objects or making repetitive movements, such as vacuuming, ironing, weights
- swimming, going to the gym or playing sport.

You should get back to these activities gradually, and should only drive again when you are comfortable enough to do an emergency stop without hesitating.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

If you have a drain you will need a wound care check in the dressing clinic at the Rose centre in a week or sooner. If you are going home with a drain you should also be given advice by the ward nurses on how to care for it and a separate patient information sheet about this.

The date of your wound care check appointment is _____

You will have an appointment at the Rose centre 10-14 days later for the results of your operation.

The date of your results appointment is _____

Useful sources of information

People may react differently after breast cancer treatment and you may feel a range of different emotions over the coming weeks and months.

It's normal for your emotions to be up and down, and talking to your family and friends about your experiences and how you feel about them can give you good emotional support.

If you would like to, you can also talk to your breast care nurse who can give information on how to contact others going through a similar experience or how to access further support from other organisations.

Breast Cancer Care is another good source of information, support and local contact information

Their website is: www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Or call: 0808 800 6000

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about returning to your everyday activities after your lumpectomy and axillary surgery, please contact the breast care nurses Tracey Hall or Jane Thomson on 020 8725 4745 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm), or breast care nurse Ali Woods on 020 8725 1223 (Wednesday to Friday, 9am to 4pm). Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 or 020 8725 3227.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

