

# Caring for yourself after your breast reduction or mastopexy

This leaflet explains more about returning to your everyday activities after your breast reduction or mastopexy operation. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is breast reduction or mastopexy?

A breast reduction is where both skin and breast tissue are removed.

A mastopexy is where only skin is removed - no breast tissue.

## What should I do before I leave hospital?

Make sure you have someone to drive you home – and ask them to bring a small cushion or pillow to put under your seat belt to make it more comfortable.

Make sure you have any tablets or medicines you need and that you know how and when to take them.

Also make sure you have been told about your outpatient appointment and given a copy of your discharge letter from the hospital.

Finally, make sure you have all the telephone contact numbers you need at the hospital.

## After I leave hospital

### Dos and don'ts

Do rest for at least two weeks – get someone to do the shopping, cleaning, cooking, laundry and childcare.

Do wear a non-wired sports bra that fits well with wide elastic panels for comfort and support (not a vest-style sports bra as this type will flatten your breasts and won't give you enough support). You may have been measured for a bra on the ward, but if not try on a few sports bras and choose the one that fits best and is the most comfortable and supportive. Wear this bra at night for at least two weeks after the surgery for support - longer if you need to.

Do get re-measured and fitted for a new bra once the swelling has gone down after a few months. You'll need to do this in a shop, such as the underwear section of a department store.

Do only buy one bra at a time – you'll see more changes in your breast over the next six months to a year, so keep getting re-measured every few months.

Do keep moving around and doing gentle exercises - shoulder exercises will help stop stiffness.

### Don't

Don't wear a vest-style sports bra as this type will flatten your breasts and won't give you enough support.

Don't wear an underwired bra as this will rub against your stitch line.

Don't lie on the side or sides where you had the operation - use pillows for support in bed.

Your normal activities will be restricted over the next few weeks, please see below for further advice on this.

**You may notice:**

You may have less feeling in your nipples and breasts. This numbness is caused by swelling and will normally fade in a few weeks. Occasionally it may last longer or be permanent.

Your scar may get red and lumpy and could take at least a year to settle down. There is a chance it will stay raised and noticeable. Once your wound has healed and your dressings are off, you can wash and dry the area normally and then moisturise the scar twice a day with a non-perfumed cream, such as E45, Diprobase, Vaseline Intensive Care or 50/50- 50% liquid paraffin and 50% soft paraffin.

You may have lumps around your scar where the skin was removed – these might look like small pyramids sticking out. When all the swelling has gone down, you may be able to have more surgery to remove these. You can discuss this at your follow up outpatient appointment with the surgeon.

Your breasts may be more asymmetrical than before. Nobody has symmetrical breasts but surgery may make the asymmetry more noticeable and your breasts or nipples may be more uneven or different in size or because of the scars.

These problems may not be able to be fixed. Discuss any issues you have with the surgeon at you follow-up appointment.

## Looking after my wound

Don't soak in a bath while you are wearing dressings. You can shower if your dressings are waterproof, but if any of your dressings lift and become wet these must be changed. You can change them yourself if you have been given spares or your GP practice nurse can do it for you.

## Will I be in pain?

You will have some pain. Take regular pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen as long as you are not allergic. If you need stronger painkillers, or a repeat prescription, discuss this with your GP. Some painkillers that contain codeine can cause constipation – you can take a mild laxative such as senna or lactulose to help prevent this. Discuss with your GP or pharmacist if you are not sure whether the pain relief you are taking causes constipation.

## When can I get back to normal activities?

Don't go back to work for at least three to four weeks. Exactly how long you need to have off will depend on the type of job you do and how quickly you recover. You can discuss this with the surgeon or with the nursing staff caring for you.

Don't drive for four weeks or until your wounds have healed and you have no pain.

Don't play any sport where you need to move your upper body for at least six weeks.

Your operation may affect your ability to breast-feed.

## What should I do if I have a problem?

You will be discharged when the medical and nursing staff think it is safe for you to go home.

**Look out for the following:**

Bleeding – apply firm pressure to the area for 15 minutes. If bleeding doesn't stop after firm pressure for 15 minutes, continue to apply pressure and go to the nearest emergency department (ED or A&E).

Wound breakdown – it is quite common for small parts of your stitches to open up and fluid to leak out. If this happens, put on a simple dressing (you can get these from a chemist). Then make an appointment either with your GP or the Plastic Dressing Clinic (PDC) whichever will be

quicker and nearer. If you go to your GP, make an appointment with the PDC as well afterwards so they can check you are OK.

Signs of infection, including redness, swelling and discharge (oozing) from the wound and a raised body temperature. Contact your GP straight away if you notice any of these signs and change your hospital appointment so it is sooner. If you can't see your GP, contact Keate ward or the PDC or go to an emergency department (ED or A&E) or an urgent care centre straight away. You will need antibiotics - an untreated infection could become life threatening.

## Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will be given an appointment to see the PDC nurses about a week after your surgery. The nurses will check your wound and change your dressing. You may need to have your dressing changed again by the PDC nurses and/or your GP practice nurse or district nurse.

You will also be given an appointment to see a consultant four to six weeks after surgery, at the hospital where you first saw one. If you haven't had a consultant appointment through the post by the time of your PDC appointment at St George's, you can arrange one there or you can call the appointments line below.

## Useful sources of information

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/cosmetic-treatments-guide/Pages/breast-reduction-female.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/cosmetic-treatments-guide/Pages/breast-reduction-female.aspx)

[www.bapras.org.uk/public/patient-information/surgery-guides/breast-reduction](http://www.bapras.org.uk/public/patient-information/surgery-guides/breast-reduction)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about breast reduction or mastopexy, please contact the plastic dressing clinic nurses on 020 8725 0473 or the lead clinical nurse in plastic surgery on 020 8672 1071, or 020 8725 1255 and ask for bleep 6332 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 or 3227.

For appointments, please call 020 8725 5855.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://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](mailto: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](http://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

