

Non-cancer related bilateral mastectomy discharge information sheet

This leaflet explains more about going home after having a non-cancer related bilateral mastectomy. Please remember there are variations depending on your individual circumstances.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a non-cancer related mastectomy?

A non-cancer related mastectomy is an operation to reduce the size of the chest by removing breast tissue. The chest is reshaped and the nipples repositioned to produce a flatter chest to better suit your body. This is not an essential operation and the decision to have it depends on how you feel about the appearance of your chest.

What do I need to do when going home?

Someone must drive you home.

Ensure you have any tablets or medicines plus advice on how and when to take them.

You should have at least two weeks resting. This means you will need to arrange for someone else to help with the housework, shopping, cleaning cooking, laundry and childcare.

You will have dressings over the wounds and it is normally requested that these remain dry and intact for 7-10 days until your follow-up appointment at the Plastic Dressings Clinic (PDC) based at St Georges Hospital. If you have not received details about this appointment within a few days of discharge, please contact the appointments line below to book this.

If your surgeon decides you require a **surgical chest binder** or tubigrip support over your dressings after surgery, you will be expected to wear this for **24 hours a day for six weeks** until the swelling and bruising subsides. Wearing the binder for more than six weeks is more comfortable for some people.

Make sure you have been informed of your PDC and/or outpatient appointment and given a copy of your discharge letter before you leave the hospital.

Make sure you have telephone contact numbers at the hospital.

What can I do to help my recovery?

Do not lift anything heavy for six weeks. This means children, vacuum cleaners, pots, pans, kettles, laundry and shopping bags.

Avoid any sports/exercise for at least six weeks. This includes sexual intercourse.

Do not drive for 4-6 weeks or until the wounds have healed and you have no pain.

Do not return to work for at least four weeks. This will vary according to the type of job you do and your recovery.

Do keep moving around and take gentle exercise.

What should I look out for once discharged home?

You will only be discharged when the medical and nursing staff decide it is safe. However, things to watch out for when you are home include:

Bleeding – If you experience bleeding after leaving hospital, apply firm pressure to the area for 15 minutes. If this cannot be stopped with firm pressure over the wound for 15 minutes, you should continue to apply pressure and go to the nearest Accident and Emergency Department.

Wound breakdown – Small areas of the line of stitches may open up and produce fluid. This is common. If this occurs apply a simple dressing from a chemist. Then arrange to see your GP or make an appointment in the Plastic Dressing Clinic (PDC) whichever is more convenient in terms of time and distance. If you choose to go to your GP, also then arrange an appointment in the Plastic Dressing Clinic so that any problems can be monitored.

The loss of the nipple or parts of the nipple is also a complication which should have been discussed with you at your pre-op appointment. **Smoking** increases the chance of nipple loss, so you should stop this at the time of the operation and during the recovery period.

Infection - Signs include redness, swelling, increased pain, heat and/or discharge from the wound. This can usually be treated successfully with antibiotics. Please contact your GP immediately if you notice any of the above signs and arrange to bring forward your appointment with the hospital. Out of hours you should attend Accident and Emergency or an Urgent Care Centre. **Do not delay** getting medical attention, as an infection can become life threatening if left untreated.

Seroma/Haematoma - Swelling after your surgery can be a build up of tissue fluid/blood which we may need to drain in clinic if it becomes too large and/or uncomfortable. This is the reason why the surgeon may advise you to wear a binder for six weeks or longer.

What normal changes may I expect after a non-cancer related mastectomy?

Altered sensation. You can expect some loss of feeling in the skin around the surgical site. This numbness usually reduces in the following weeks. Occasionally this may last longer or can be permanent.

Scars. These can become red and lumpy. Any scar takes a minimum of 12 months to settle. There is a possibility that it will remain raised and noticeable. Once all areas have healed and the dressings are removed, you are advised to wash and dry the area normally. You should also moisturise and massage the scar twice a day with a non-perfumed cream (such as E45, 50/50 ointment - 50% liquid paraffin and 50% soft paraffin, Diprobase, Vaseline Intensive Care).

Extra skin lumps. As the swelling reduces and the scars settle you may notice small pyramids of additional soft tissue at the scar edges. These can be reduced with surgery at a later date under a local anaesthetic if required. The surgeon will talk to you about this at the follow up outpatient appointment.

Nipple pigmentation. The nipple can often be hyper or hypo pigmented following this surgery

(lighter or darker in colour than before). This can sometimes change over time with moisturising and massaging or may be a permanent change.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will usually require a follow up appointment approximately one week after discharge with one of the nurses in PDC to check your wound progress and a follow up with your consultant 6-8 weeks later. These appointments will either be made before you leave the hospital, or given to you by post or by phone. If you have not received notification of your appointments within 3-4 days of your discharge please contact plastic surgery appointments on 020 8725 5855 who can book this for you. Please note that you may require further follow ups in PDC but these will be arranged at your first PDC review.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/mastectomy/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/treatment/>

Breast Cancer Care (benign conditions)

<https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/have-i-got-breast-cancer/benign-breast-conditions/gynaecomastia>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your non-cancer related mastectomy, please contact the plastic surgery dressing clinic nurses on 020 8725 0473 or the lead clinical nurse in plastic surgery on 020 8672 1071 and ask the operator to bleep number 6332 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact Keate ward on 020 8725 3226 /3227.

For plastic surgery appointments, contact 020 8725 5855.

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 9.30am and 4.30pm, 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

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