

Non-Cancer Related Bilateral Mastectomy Discharge Information

This leaflet explains 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.

When can I leave hospital?

You can go home when the plastic surgical team confirms you are medically fit for discharge.

After I leave hospital

You will be eating normally and be able to mobilise.

You cannot drive for at least two weeks, so you must have someone to take you home.

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

You need to 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.

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 plastic dressing clinic (PDC) and / or outpatient appointment. Make sure you have been given a copy of your discharge letter before you leave the hospital. **If you have not been given a PDC appointment when you leave you should contact appointments on 020 8725 0007 to arrange this.**

Please make sure you have the name and telephone contact numbers of the ward / unit on which you were an inpatient so you call them if you have any concerns prior to your PDC or Outpatient appointment.

Looking after my wound

You will have wounds. These may be exposed if they are dry but usually there will be dressings covering the wounds. It is normally requested that the dressings remain dry and intact for seven to ten days until your follow-up appointment at the PDC. If the dressing is waterproof, you can shower but if water gets under the dressing it needs to be changed. You may be given spare dressings for you to change at home if necessary.

Will I be in pain?

You will have some discomfort for a few weeks while the bruising and swelling resolve. You can take simple painkillers such as paracetamol to manage this. If this does not reduce the pain, you should make an appointment to see your GP to get stronger painkillers.

Will I need to do any specific exercises?

You must keep mobile by walking around. Move your arms and rotate your shoulders to ensure they do not get stiff. **You cannot undertake active exercise that would put a strain on the chest, such as lifting, driving, gardening, housework, cycling, swimming or running for four to six weeks depending on how the wounds heal and how well you recover.**

When can I get back to normal activities?

You will recover over a four to six weeks period and should be back to normal activities at six weeks providing there have been no complications with the wounds. Advice is:

- **Do not lift anything heavy for six weeks.** This means children, vacuum cleaners, pots, pans, kettles, laundry and shopping bags.
- **Avoid any sports / exercise that would put any strain on the chest for at least six weeks.**
- **Do not drive for four to six weeks** or until the wounds have healed and you have no pain. You must be safe to drive. Please check your insurance policy to see if you need to notify them of any surgery.
- **Do not return to work for at least two weeks.** This will vary according to the type of job you do and on your recovery.

What should I do if I have a problem?

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 Emergency Department.

- **Wound breakdown** – Small areas of the line of stitches may open 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, you should then arrange an appointment in the PDC 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-operative appointment. **Smoking increases the chance of nipple loss.** You should have stopped before the operation and should continue to stop 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 the Emergency Department (ED) or an Urgent Care Centre. If possible, please come back to St George's ED. **Do not delay** getting medical attention, as an infection can become life threatening if left untreated.
- **Seroma / Haematoma** - Swelling after your surgery can result in a collection of tissue fluid / blood under the skin. This is the reason the surgeon may advise you to wear a binder for six weeks or longer. This is also the reason you are advised to avoid activities that strain the chest as this can increase the chance of seroma formation. This usually resolves itself over time. However, in a few cases we may need to drain in clinic if it becomes too large and / or uncomfortable.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will usually require a follow up appointment approximately seven to ten days after discharge with one of the nurses in PDC to check your wound progress and a follow up with your consultant six to eight weeks later. Your discharge summary will state an indication of when the team would like you to be seen in PDC for a wound review but this is not the appointment. The appointment may not be exactly the same as stated on the discharge summary.

These appointments will either be made before you leave the hospital or sent to you by post or by telephone.

If you have not received notification of your appointments within three to four days of being discharged, please contact the ward from which you were discharged or contact the plastic surgery appointments on 020 8725 0007 who can book this for you.

Please note that you may require further appointments in PDC but these will be arranged at your first PDC review.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices

- [Gynaecomastia | Breast Cancer Now](#)
- [Gender dysphoria - Treatment - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your non-cancer related mastectomy, please leave a voicemail for 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 4pm). Out of hours, please contact the ward from which you were discharged. Alternatively, you can email the team on stgh-tr.plasticdressingclinic@nhs.net Responses can take up to 48 hours and only occur within office hours.

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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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