

Post- surgery information

Following a wide excision and sentinel lymph node biopsy or axillary lymph node dissection

The information in this leaflet is to aid your recovery from two weeks after your operation

Care of your wound

- After you have had your wounds checked and stitches trimmed at your Breast Clinic appointment, you can shower normally or take a waist high bath. Use a mild soap or just water to wash your wounds for at least the first 6 weeks and pat dry gently with a clean towel. Do not lie back and soak in a bath for at least 6 weeks, as this may soften your scars and cause them to open.
- If you have surgical glue on your wound, please do not pick at this. It will flake away gradually as you shower or bath. It may take several weeks to completely go.
- 4 weeks after your surgery, you can start to moisturise your scars daily using an unperfumed body lotion. If you prefer, you could use a commercial scar oil from 6 weeks after your operation. Gently massage your chosen product into the scars, using a small circular motion, this will help to smooth and soften them.
- **Please note:** You will be given specific skin care advice for your whole breast, to follow during your radiotherapy.
- You can use a roll on antiperspirant/deodorant after 2 weeks and a spray after 6 weeks.

If you experience any of the following, please contact your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist for advice on 01225 824057

- Discharge, new swelling, heat, redness or rash around the wound.
- If you feel hot and shivery or have a temperature

Prevention of lymphoedema to your breast, arm and hand

Here is some helpful advice which is important to follow for the rest of your life.

To reduce your risk of lymphoedema:

- Avoid carrying and moving any heavy weights with the affected arm e.g. heavy shopping, wheelie bins, suitcases or a full bucket of water/watering can.
- Avoid steam rooms, having saunas or very hot baths
- Avoid applying hot packs and having deep tissue massage over the treated area, including neck, upper back, chest wall and affected arm.
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Wear a supportive, full cup, non-wired bra with adjustable straps.

Protect your skin against damage, cuts and grazes

- Avoid having injections, blood tests, infusions or blood pressure taken from the affected arm. **However, this does not apply in an emergency situation**
- Use insect repellent to reduce the risk of insect bites
- Wear oven gloves when cooking and gloves when gardening.
- Be careful to avoid causing cuts if using anything sharp in your hands.
- Use an electric razor or depilatory cream when removing underarm hair on the affected side.
- Keep your arm and breast on the affected side well moisturised.
- Use high factor sunscreen to protect from sunburn
- Avoid wearing clothing or jewellery that is too tight on your affected arm.
- Avoid pet scratches and bites

If you have a cut, graze or an insect bite on the affected side, clean it well, apply antiseptic cream and cover with a plaster. Observe the area and if it shows signs of infection i.e. redness, swelling, inflammation or pain, then please see your GP or Nurse Practitioner that day to obtain a two week course of antibiotics.

If you think you may have developed lymphoedema, please call your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist for advice.

Altered sensation in your arm or armpit

After the operation to your armpit, you may experience numbness, tingling or extra sensitivity in this area. These are common sensations as the nerves in the armpit are close to the lymph nodes. These sensations should settle in a few weeks, but if they persist, please contact your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist, as it may be suggested that you try a different type of pain relief.

Posture

It is important to look after your posture following your operation. It is common to feel that you need to be protective of your wounds; however, it is vital to try and sit, stand and walk normally. This will help to avoid you getting stiffness in your neck, shoulder and elbow and limit any future problems.

Here is a simple exercise to help your posture. Try this little and often during the day and continue until your arm and shoulder movement has returned to normal.

Posture correction exercise

- **Stand tall, imagining you have a string pulling you up from the middle of your head**
- **Gently lower your shoulders down towards the floor**
- **Gently take your shoulders backwards bringing your shoulder blades together**
- **Hold for 5 seconds, then relax. Try to complete this 10 times**

Arm Exercises

Your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist will have given you a leaflet from Breast Cancer Now called 'Exercises after breast cancer surgery'.

If you wish, you can also access this leaflet or download an audio version of it, via www.breastcancernow.org under the publications section.

We advise you to continue the sheet of exercises (1 to 9) from 2 weeks after your operation and throughout your radiotherapy, until you have regained your normal arm and shoulder movement.

After this, we recommend continuing the exercises daily to maintain your movement.

Other advice

Only do what you feel you have the energy to do.

We encourage you to gradually increase periods of activity and exercise.

Re introduce vacuuming, ironing and hanging out the washing gradually, using your arm as normally as possible, but avoiding heavy and repetitive tasks for at least the first 6 weeks.

Continue to take pain relief until your arm and breast are no longer painful to move.

You can resume sexual activity as soon as you feel able, however, give yourself time and do not expect too much.

No swimming for at least 6 weeks after surgery and not until 4 weeks after radiotherapy has finished, due to the risk of infection.

Please do not drive for at least 2 weeks after a sentinel node biopsy and 3 weeks, if you have had all your lymph nodes removed.

Useful organisations

Breast Cancer Now

Fifth Floor,
Ibex House, 42-47 Minories,
London.EC3N 1DY

Helpline 0808 800 6000

Email: info@breastcancer.org
www.breastcancer.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

89, Albert Embankment,
London.
SE1 7UQ
0808 808 0000

www.macmillan.org.uk

Penny Brohn Cancer Care

Chapel Pill Lane, Pill,
Bristol.BS20 OHH
01275 370 100

Email: info@pennybrohn.org
www.pennybrohn.org.uk

We Hear You

Free professional counselling for those affected by cancer or life threatening illness. For adults, teenagers+ children.
1st Floor, Frome Town Hall,
Christchurch St. West,
Frome.BA11 1EB
01373 455255

www.wehearyou.org.uk/

Local support groups

Breast of Friends, RUH, Bath. Meet on the first Monday of the each month in the seminar room in A17, from 12.30 to 2pm. Tea and a chat, plus occasional speakers. No need to book. Further information from Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists 01225 824057.

At your service. Meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 10.30am, in the Slug and Lettuce Bar, George St, Bath. Contact Nina on 01249 464111 or 07745887150 for further information.

Young Women 4 Young Women Breast Cancer Support Group. Support group meets at Southmead Hospital in Bristol on the first Wednesday of the month, 7 to 9pm. www.youngwomen4youngwomen.com

Breast Care Swimming Group. Meet on Mondays at Kingswood School, Bath, from 6.50 to 8pm. Contact Jan 01249 716298 or Sue 01225 312312. Each session costs £2.50. Please note they do not meet on bank holidays.

Contact details

Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists office 01225 824057(answerphone) Monday to Friday, from 8am to 6pm or email ruh-tr.breastcarenurses@nhs.net

Breast Unit (B3) reception desk 01225 825881 or 825882

Charlotte Ward (D9) 01225 824434 or 821082

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656 / 826319.