Post-Surgery Information

For patients undergoing mastectomy and sentinel lymph node biopsy or axillary lymph node dissection
Care of your wound

Before you are discharged home your wound will be checked by your ward nurse or your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist.

- Before your discharge, the ward nurse will check that the dressing or glue which may have been applied instead of a dressing is clean, intact and dry. Please keep your wound/dressing as dry as possible as they are only splash proof.

- You may wash the area with a mild soap and then rinse and pat it dry when your dressing is removed or 24 hours after your operation if your wound has been glued.

- Your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist will advise you when you can use a deodorant/antiperspirant.

- If your wound becomes red, swollen or is leaking please contact your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist on telephone 01225 824057. Outside of normal working hours please call Phillip Yeoman Ward (B41) 01225 825477 for advice.

Fluid collection

Once your drain(s) has been removed there is a possibility that you may get a collection of fluid (seroma) in your armpit or around your wound. If your wound feels spongy or full or you are unable to put your arm down properly please call your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist on 01225 824057 who will arrange to see you.

This fluid is common and perfectly normal and it will be fine to wait until the Monday morning should you discover it over the weekend. It will not cause any harm or damage.

If you do have fluid present, your Breast Care Nurse will drain it. This takes minutes and does not hurt.
Care of your arm, hand and prevention of lymphoedema

It is important to follow some common sense advice after your operation. You should continue to follow this advice, not just for the first few weeks after surgery.

Try to avoid:

• carrying any heavy weights such as heavy shopping, suitcases or a full bucket of water with the affected arm. This is the single most common cause of arm swelling
• having injections, blood, blood pressure taken or an infusion in the affected arm. This does not apply in an emergency situation.

Ensure you:

• elevate your arm on a pillow in the evenings especially if your arm feels uncomfortable
• wear gloves when gardening
• take care when clipping your nails or using anything sharp near hands
• use an electric razor or depilatory cream when removing underarm hair.

If you have a cut, graze or insect bite on the affected side, clean it well, apply an 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 that day to obtain a two week course of antibiotics.

After axillary lymph node surgery, swelling known as lymphoedema can occur in the arm or chest wall. This is due to the disruption in lymph drainage. If you think you may have developed lymphoedema then please call your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist.
Exercises

It's important that you continue the stretching exercises as advised until two weeks after your operation when we would like you to start more advanced arm exercises. These exercises are using different muscle groups. The Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist will give you a separate booklet illustrating these exercises and will also demonstrate them. You can also access this exercise booklet online at www.breastcancercare.org.uk under the publications section.

We advise you to perform these exercises for at least six weeks but you can continue lifelong if you wish.

Ensure you take pain relief until your arm is no longer painful to move.

Other advice

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

You should avoid driving until you can comfortably do an emergency stop, at least two weeks after your surgery. Introduce tasks such as vacuuming, ironing and hanging out the washing gradually and use your arm normally.

Follow up appointment at the Breast Clinic

You will be sent an outpatient appointment following your operation which is usually scheduled for approximately 10-13 days after your operation. You will see the surgeon and Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist at this appointment where the results of your operation and the findings under the microscope (pathology) will be explained to you. We will also check your wound.
**Fitting Temporary Prosthesis (Comfy)**

The comfy is your first prosthesis and can be worn for the first few weeks after surgery. We hope the following will be of use to you.

1. If the comfy is too big, remove some of the filling from the back of the breast form.

2. Remember that your natural breast is heavier than the comfy so in order to achieve a balanced look please remember to alter your bra straps to compensate for this.

3. Secure the comfy into your bra using pins to ensure that it will not move position. (If for some reason you are unable to wear a bra, please tell a member of staff. They will show how to fix the comfy into an undergarment)

4. The comfy is completely washable, rinse it well, ring out in a towel and dry away from direct heat.
Fitting permanent prosthesis

When your wound has healed (usually around 4-6 weeks) and when you feel ready, a permanent prosthesis can be fitted and supplied.

A breast prosthesis is an artificial breast form that replaces the shape of all or part of the breast that has been removed. It fits in a bra cup with or without a specially formed pocket.

Most breast prostheses are made from soft silicone gel encased in a thin film. They're molded to resemble the natural shape of a woman’s breast, or part of a breast. The outer surface feels soft and smooth, and may include a nipple outline.

**The fitting clinic is held on a Monday afternoon. Please telephone the Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists on 01225 824057 to make an appointment.**

Please bring a well-fitting or mastectomy bra with you. It is advisable to get measured, if you have not recently had a bra fitting, before purchasing new bras.

There are many high street stores that stock ranges of mastectomy bras but also below are some websites that you may also like to look at and purchase bras from.

www.amoena.co.uk

www.nicolajane.com

www.anita.com

www.bettyandbelle.co.uk
Useful organisations

Breast Cancer Care
5-13 Great Suffolk Street, London, SE10NS
Helpline - 0808 800 6000
(Freephone)
Switchboard - 02079603400
Email: info@breastcancercare.org.uk
Website: www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Penny Brohn Cancer Care
Chapel Pill Lane, Pill,
Bristol,
BS20 0HH
Telephone: 01275 370 100
Email: info@pennybrohn.org

We Hear You
Free professional counselling for anyone affected by cancer or another life threatening illness. For adults, teenagers and children.
2A Market place, Frome, BA11 1AG
Telephone 01373 455255
Email: info@wehearyou.org.uk
Website: www.wehearyou.org.uk/

Local support groups

Breast of Friends, RUH Bath This group meets on the first Monday of the month in the seminar room, RUH Pain clinic (A17), from 12.30-2pm. Tea and a chat, plus occasional speakers on a variety of subjects. No need to book. For further information contact Clinical Nurse Specialists on 01225 824057

At Your Service This support group meets for about two hours, on the first Wednesday of the month at 10.30am in the Slug & Lettuce Bar, George Street, Bath. The sessions cost £2 per person. You can book by calling Nina on 01249 464111 or mobile 07745887150.

Somerset Cancer Care: Mendip Support Group This group meets at The Sherston Inn, Priory Road, Wells on Fridays from 10am-midday. No booking or referral required. Contact St Margaret’s Hospice on 0845 070 8910 or Katie on 01823 346959.
Young Women 4 Young Women Breast Cancer Group This breast cancer support group based at Southmead Hospital, Bristol. They meet the first Wednesday of the month 7-9pm. Telephone 07546512637, email yw4yw@hotmail.com or visit www.youngwomen4youngwomen.com.

Breast Care Swimming Group This group meets at 6.50 - 8pm on Mondays at Kingswood School, Lansdown, Bath. Contact Jan 01249 716298 or Sue 01225 312312. Each session costs £2.50. Please note that this group does not meet on bank holidays.

You may like to write some notes
Contact Details

Breast Unit reception desk 01225 825881

Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists office 01225 824057 (answerphone)
Available 9am - 5pm

Phillip Yeoman ward B41 01225 825476

Breast Clinical Nurse Specialists

Cherry Miller
Kate Hope
Debbie Cole
Rachael Bolitho
Irene Buckley

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.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.