



# Advice for breast cancer patients following surgery

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## Information for patients from your breast care nurses

This leaflet gives you advice following your breast surgery. It explains:

- how to look after your wound and dressings at home
- when to start your exercises
- how you can control your pain.

If you have any questions after reading this leaflet, please speak to your breast care nurse.

**You must have an adult with you for the first 24 hours after you leave hospital.** They will be able to help you with your needs, as required.

## How do I look after my wound, stitches, and dressings after surgery?

### Stitches

- Your stitches will be under your skin and are dissolvable (they will disappear on their own). This usually takes 2 weeks.
- Steri strips may cover your wound. You can:
  - remove these yourself 10 days after your surgery, or
  - book an appointment with your GP practice nurse.

### Dressings

- If steri strips cover your wound, your surgeon will place a waterproof adhesive dressing over the top of the strips. Do not touch or remove this dressing for at least one week.
- Remove your dressing 7 to 10 days after your surgery. You can remove the dressing yourself. If you do not wish to remove it yourself, please contact your GP practice to make an appointment with a GP practice nurse for 7 to 10 days after your surgery.

- There may be a small amount of bloodstained or straw-coloured discharge on your dressing; this is normal. Contact the Cancer Care Line for advice, if you feel that the discharge is:
  - heavy
  - offensive in odour
  - bright red; or
  - causing irritation.
- A waterproof dressing will cover your wound. You can have a shower with the dressing on, but do not soak the wound in a bath for at least 1 week.

### **I have bruising around my wound, is this normal?**

Yes. Bruising after surgery is normal; the amount of bruising varies between patients. Your operation site will need time to recover from any bruising and swelling.

### **Is there anything I can do to improve the appearance of my scar?**

If your wound heals without any complications, you can use non-perfumed moisturising cream on your scar area each day. The cream will help soften and smooth the scar. Please wait until your follow-up appointment before using the cream. For more information, please read the **Scar massage** leaflet. (<https://leaflets.ekhuft.nhs.uk/scar-massage/html/>)

### **When should I start my exercises?**

The hospital will send you home with some exercises to do. These exercises will help you recover following your surgery. Remember to start your exercises as soon as you feel able to.

If you have any questions about these exercises, please contact the Cancer Care Line and speak to a member of staff.

The **Exercises after breast cancer surgery** booklet is available to view via the Breast Cancer Now web site. (<https://breastcancernow.org/media-assets/dmbpk1rz/bcc6-exercises-after-breast-cancer-surgery-web-pdf.pdf>)

### **How do I control any pain?**

Everyone is different; however, most people feel some discomfort after their operation.

If you have had surgery under your armpit, this can be more uncomfortable than the operation site on your breast.

After surgery you may feel tired. You may also feel numb on the back of your upper arm and have strange feelings in your armpit and arm; these are normal. The numbness may be permanent. The strange feeling can stop on its own, but this can take a few months and varies between patients.

If needed, take pain relief for the first few days after your surgery. The hospital will send you home with pain relief medication. Some people become constipated after taking painkillers, so please make sure you eat and drink a healthy diet following your surgery. More information on eating a healthy diet is available on the **NHS Eat Well** web page (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>).

### If I have been sent home with a drain, how do I look after it?

- **If you have been sent home from hospital with a drain.** Your consultant will confirm how long the drain will be in place. This should be stated on your discharge summary, which is sent electronically to your GP. The ward will arrange an appointment for you to have your drain removed, by either your GP practice nurse or district nurse.
- **If you had a reconstruction breast surgery,** the drain is removed in the hospital.

If you have any questions or concerns about your drain, please contact a breast care nurse via the Cancer Care Line 01227 868666 (Monday to Friday; 9am to 4pm). Or, contact your GP practice or call NHS 111.

### Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Yes. Your follow-up appointment will be booked once your results are available. Your results are usually available within a few weeks, but your consultant or breast care nurse can confirm when this is likely to be.

### When can I begin my normal daily activities again?

It is normal to feel more tired than usual after your operation.

Avoid heavy household work such as hoovering, ironing, and lifting heavy objects for at least 2 weeks following your surgery, and possibly for up to 6 weeks depending on what surgery you had. You will have discussed this with your breast care nurse before your surgery, but you can discuss it again with your consultant at your follow-up appointment.

### When can I return to work?

Have at least 2 weeks off work following breast cancer surgery. You may need longer, depending on the type of surgery you had. Your breast care nurse will have talked to you about this before your surgery.

The hospital will give you a sick certificate before you leave hospital to cover this 2 week period. If you are still uncomfortable or in pain 2 weeks after your surgery, please contact either your GP or breast care nurse for advice. Your GP will be able to give you another sick certificate, if needed.

### What if I have any concerns or questions when I return home?

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact the Cancer Care Line on 01227 868666. Ask to speak to your breast clinical nurse specialist, Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays).

If you have concerns out-of-hours, please call one of the following.

- Your GP or your local Urgent Treatment Centre. For example, Estuary View Whitstable, Buckland Hospital Dover, or Kent and Canterbury Hospital.
- NHS 111.

**In an emergency, please call 999.**

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.**

**Please let us know:**

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

**You can let us know this by:**

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments**, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email ([ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)).

**Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient information leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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