

Aftercare advice for Mr Williams and Mr Chiana's breast cancer patients

Information for breast cancer patients

This leaflet aims to give you advice following your breast surgery, about how to look after yourself and your wound at home.

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 by being absorbed); this usually takes two weeks.
- Your wound may be covered with steristrips. You can remove these yourself 10 days after your surgery or book an appointment with your GP practice nurse and ask them to remove them for you.

Dressings

- If your wound is covered with steristrips your surgeon may place a waterproof adhesive dressing over the top of your steristrips; this dressing should not be touched or removed.
- There may be a small amount of blood stained or straw-coloured discharge from the operation on your dressing; this is normal. However, if you feel that the discharge is heavy, smells bad, is bright red, or causing irritation, you should contact the Cancer Care Line and speak to a member of staff who will give you further advice.
- Your wound is covered with a waterproof dressing so you can have a bath or a shower with it on, but do not soak the wound for five days.
- Your dressings should be removed within five to seven days after your surgery (either by you, your practice nurse, or district nurse). This appointment should be arranged before you leave hospital after your operation.



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, as this can help to soften and smooth the scar. Please wait until your follow-up appointment before using the cream. For more information on massage, please refer to the Trust's **Scar massage** leaflet www.ekhufnhs.uk/handtherapyleaflets/

When should I start my exercises?

You will be sent home from hospital with some exercises to do, which 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.

How do I control any pain?

Everyone is different, however most people experience 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 and the strange feeling can stop on its own, but it can take a few months and varies between patients.

We advise you to take pain relief for the first few days after your surgery, if needed. The Hospital will send you home with pain relief medication. Some people can become constipated after taking painkillers, so please make sure you eat and drink a healthy diet following your surgery. For information on eating a healthy diet, please refer to the NHS web site 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(s) you will be supported at home by the district nurses; the ward will arrange this for you before you leave hospital. The district nurse will visit you at home to check your drain. They will remove the drain once the drainage is less than 50mls within 24 hours.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Yes. Your follow-up appointment will be booked for approximately two to three weeks after your surgery.

When can I begin my normal daily activities again?

It is normal to feel more tired than usual after your operation. We advise you to avoid heavy household work such as Hoovering, ironing, and lifting heavy objects for at least two weeks following your surgery, and possibly for up to six 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?

We recommend you have a minimum of two weeks off work following breast cancer surgery, but you may need longer depending on the type of surgery you have 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 two week period. If you are still uncomfortable or in pain two weeks after your surgery, please contact either your GP or breast care nurse for advice. Your GP will be able to provide 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 86 86 66 and ask to speak to your Breast Clinical Nurse Specialist, Monday to Friday (except Bank Holidays).

If you have concerns out of hours please call either:

- your GP
- NHS 111; or
- the ward if your query is regarding a District Nurse visit.

In an emergency, please call 999.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in 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 had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation