

Patient information

Mastectomy

Breast Services

What is a Mastectomy?

Mastectomy is the removal of the breast, including the nipple, but not the chest muscles or other structures. The operation takes just over one hour.

What are the benefits of having a Mastectomy

This operation will remove the tumour in your breast and remove lymph nodes from the armpit to help decide if any extra treatment will be helpful.

What are the risks of having a Mastectomy?

- There is a chance of a **haematoma** (a collection of blood under your wound) forming. You may have to return to the operating theatre to have this removed.
- Sometimes a collection of fluid forms under your wound. This is called a **seroma**. This can happen several days after your operation and is simply removed by a needle and syringe.
- Your wound, like any other wound, may become infected. You will be given antibiotics for this (these can be given to you by your family doctor (GP)).
- There is a risk of developing clots in the legs (DVT's) which can move to the lungs (pulmonary embolism). You will be given special stockings to wear during and after your operation and have blood thinning injections whilst in hospital as prevention.

What would happen if I have no treatment?

You should talk to your Consultant or Breast Care Nurse about any possible alternative treatments. If you decide not to have any surgery your cancer will continue to grow.

What sort of anaesthetic will I have?

You will be given a general anaesthetic. General anaesthesia is drug-induced unconsciousness. It is always provided by an anaesthetist, who is a doctor with specialist training.

Unfortunately, general anaesthesia can cause side effects and complications. Side effects are common, but are usually short-lived: they include nausea, confusion and pain.

Complications are very rare, but can cause lasting injury: they include awareness, paralysis and death.

There is a risk of damage to teeth, particularly caps or crowns and veneers. Your anaesthetist will take every care, but occasionally damage can occur.

The risks of anaesthesia and surgery are lower for those who are undergoing minor surgery, and who are young, fit, active and well.

You will be given an opportunity to discuss anaesthetic options and risks with an anaesthetist before your surgery.

If you are worried about any of these risks, please speak to your Consultant or a member of their team.

Getting ready for your operation

- You will be seen in the pre-operative clinic, usually one to two weeks before your operation.
- You will be weighed and measured, screened for MRSA and possibly have an ECG (a heart tracing).
- The staff will ask routine questions about your health, the medicine you take at the moment and any allergies you may have.
- You will be told when to stop eating and drinking before your operation this will also be stated in your admission letter.
- Most patients will be admitted on the day of their operation if they have already attended the Pre-Operative Assessment Clinic.

The day of your operation

You will be able to discuss the operation with your surgeon. You will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you understand the procedure, and what the operation involves.

The operation takes approximately one hour.

What should I expect after my operation?

- When you return to the ward you may have a thin plastic tube (drain) coming from your wound site. This tube drains fluid away from the wound into small plastic bags. The drain can reduce the risk of bruising or a collection of fluid and can stay in from a few days up to two weeks. Sometimes glue is used to reduce the need for a drain.
- Your wound will have one dissolvable stitch in it. This stitch will dissolve and so will not need removing. A light dressing will cover your wound.
- A nurse will check your pulse, blood pressure, breathing and wound regularly.

It is important that if you feel any pain you must tell the nursing staff, who can give you painkillers to help.

- It is quite common to have some numbness or tingling across your chest and down the inside of your arm for a while after the operation. This is because the operation affects some nerves. Please do not worry, as this will fade in time.
- The nursing staff will also advise you when you can start taking sips of water. Anaesthetics can make some people sick. If you feel sick, we advise you not to drink until this feeling has passed. The nursing staff may offer tablets/ injection to help this sick feeling go away.
- **The first time you get out of bed, please make sure you ask a nurse to be with you. This is in case you feel dizzy.**
- As soon as the anaesthetic has fully worn off you will be encouraged to become more mobile and active.

After your operation

- The nursing staff will help you get out of your bed and get washed. You will be able to have your meals sitting in a chair.
- You will be given a leaflet on basic arm exercises. It is important that you start these exercises as soon as possible.
- Your arm on the side that you have had your operation on may feel **stiff**. The exercises are designed to get it back to normal.

Going Home

It is possible that you may be able to go home on the same day, your breast care team will advise.

Sometimes it is recommended to stay overnight and go home the day after your surgery providing everything is alright.

Before you go home you will be fitted with a light, soft, temporary breast form to wear in your bra under your clothes to give you a shape.

Discharge Information

You may be discharged from hospital with a drain still attached to your wound site. You will be given information about how to care for it.

Pain relief and medication

The nursing staff will advise you about painkillers before you leave the hospital. Please tell the nurses what pain relief tablets you have at home.

Your wound

The ward nurses will arrange for a district nurse to visit your home to assess your wound/ drain. Please inform ward staff if you are staying at a different address on discharge.

Getting back to normal

Remember, you have just had an operation, and you will take some weeks – even months to recover.

It is normal to feel more tired than usual for a few weeks after having an operation. This will pass.

You may feel tearful from time to time. This is understandable. If you feel particularly low, please contact your Breast Care Nurse.

Returning to work

- You can self-certify for the first seven days of sickness. After this, a medical certificate (fit note) may be issued by your hospital doctor to cover the expected time off you will need after being discharged.
- Advice on returning to work will be given.

Further Appointments

Before you leave hospital you will be given an appointment to come back to clinic. This appointment is usually 14 to 17 days after your operation. At this appointment you will see the doctor and a Breast Care Nurse for your results and to discuss any further treatment with you.

The Breast Care Nurse will also see you six weeks after your operation, to fit a prosthesis, which is a permanent replacement for the lightweight breast form you were given in hospital.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

The Breast Care Nurses

Tel: 0151 706 2927 (24 hour answerphone)

Text phone number: 18001 0151 706 2927

Breast Cancer Care

Tel: 0808 800 6000 (Freephone)

Macmillan Cancer Support

Tel: 0808 808 00 00

There are many local support groups, please ask your Breast Care Nurse.

All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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