



Beaumont Hospital
Surgical Directorate

RECOVERY FOLLOWING BREAST SURGERY

Information
for Patients

Recovery involves healing both on a physical and emotional level and the time taken varies from individual to individual. The following is a list of some short – term problems that can develop after Breast Surgery.

Bleeding

Although measures are taken during surgery to prevent bleeding, occasionally it can occur when you have left the operating theatre or even when you have gone home. It is normal to see some blood on the wound dressing but if you notice excessive blood on the dressing or blood seeping out from the dressing please put pressure on the area and contact a nurse or doctor for advice. See contact details below.

Pain

This is a common side effect of any surgery. Everybody feels pain differently. However, bigger surgery often leads to more experience of pain. Pain is more likely to persist if you had your lymph glands removed. This pain is usually in your armpit and running down your arm. Moving your shoulder can become difficult and painful. To help relieve the pain, take your painkillers as prescribed and follow your exercise plan given to you by your physiotherapist. Wearing a supportive bra can help if you have discomfort or your breasts feel heavy. Sometimes wearing it both day and night can help. If you experience ongoing problems, please inform your doctor or nurse so that pain can be assessed and treatment prescribed.

Swelling

This is a common symptom after breast surgery. It may affect your breast or chest wall and sometimes your shoulder and arm. This is all part

of the healing process but the swelling should be reducing by 6-8 weeks following surgery.

Scar tissue formed after an operation may prevent good lymph drainage and can lead to swelling. If this swelling persists after two months it may be an early sign of lymphoedema. Please contact your doctor or nurse for advice if you have any concerns in this regard.

Seroma

For some patients, fluid may collect under your arm or along the mastectomy scar after breast surgery. This collection of fluid is known as a seroma and is usually reabsorbed by the body over time.

However, if it causes discomfort or is persistent, you may need to have the fluid drained using a small needle and syringe. In some cases the fluid may re-fill and you may need it drained more than once.

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is an accumulation of fluid in an area, which can lead to swelling and inflammation. Lymphoedema may present months, or even many years after surgery. It usually (but not always) starts in the hand or lower arm and is usually not painful. If you are at risk, you will be given further information about lymphoedema.

Bruising

Following breast surgery bruising can be quite common. It can be mild to moderate depending on the individual. This is nothing to worry about and will eventually disappear.

Haematoma

Occasionally blood collects within the tissues surrounding the wound causing swelling, discomfort and hardness. This is called a

haematoma, the body eventually reabsorbs the blood but it can take a few weeks.

Wound Infection

Infection can develop immediately after surgery or at any time until the wound is healed. Wound healing usually takes 2-3 weeks. The following are symptoms, which can indicate a wound infection;

- Increase in pain
- Increase in swelling
- Hot to touch
- Redness in the area
- Discharge from the wound
- Feeling generally unwell with high temperature

If you experience any of the above symptoms, please contact your doctor or breast care nurse.

Sometimes you may need a course of antibiotics to treat the infection.

Loss/altered sensation

Sometimes when lymph glands are removed, you can experience a change in sensation or loss of sensation running down the inner side of your upper arm.

This is caused by trauma to the nerve, which can lead to a variety of symptoms such as;

- Loss of sensation or reduced sensation
- Numbness
- Weakness in the arm
- Coldness
- Sensitivity to touch or pressure
- Burning or tingling sensation

Sometimes after having breast surgery you can experience similar symptoms in your breast or chest wall.

These symptoms should improve and may completely resolve within 3 to 6 months after surgery. Some patients may have permanent loss or altered sensation in your upper arm. If you are concerned please inform your doctor or nurse.

Driving

You may not drive for 24 hours following general anaesthetic. Following breast surgery, you should refrain from driving for at least 2-3 weeks until the drains/dressings have been removed. Refer to your motor insurance company policy for guidelines.

Helping your Recovery

Take some gentle exercise daily, perhaps some walking to build up your strength. Ask your surgical team for advice about what is best for you.

Other

If you have concerns about any of the symptoms listed above, please contact the Breast Care Nurses during office hours or the Surgical on Call team at weekends or evenings.

Contact Numbers

Breast Care Nurse Specialist 01 8093183

Prof Hill Secretary 01 8093093

Mr. Allen Secretary 01 7974724

Mr Power Secretary 01 7974783

Surgical on call team 01 8093000

(For urgent enquiries only, ask to be put through to surgical team on call)

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