The aim of this booklet is to give you some general information about your surgery. If you have any questions or concerns after reading it please speak with your Nurse Practitioner or a member of staff at the Jane Ashley Centre at the Churchill Hospital or E Ward at the Horton General Hospital. Telephone numbers are given at the end of this booklet.

What is a mastectomy?

The purpose of this operation is to remove your whole breast, including the nipple, leaving your chest wall area flat on the affected side. Your chest will remain completely covered by skin. The scar extends across your chest from the middle near your breastbone to under your arm.

A mastectomy may be recommended for a number of reasons, for example:

• If the cancer lies behind your nipple or your nipple is affected.
• If you have small breasts.
• If the cancer occupies a considerable amount of your breast.
• If the cancer has developed in more than one area of your breast.
• If this is a recurrence of cancer within the same breast.
• If, after discussion with your Surgeon and Nurse Practitioner, you choose to have a mastectomy.
• In certain circumstances, where a smaller operation might not be advisable or possible due to health reasons.
What are the benefits?

• To reduce the potential risk of needing another operation: the purpose of a mastectomy is to remove as much of the breast tissue as possible and therefore reduce the risk of further surgery being required.

• To reduce the need for radiotherapy: in some cases, there is no need for radiotherapy (X-ray treatment) after a mastectomy, however this decision can only be made after the results of the tissue analysis are known. The final decision about whether you will need radiotherapy is usually made at your postoperative clinic visit.

What are the risks?

All operations involve risks. You need to be aware of these so that you can make an informed choice about surgery. Your Surgeon will talk to you in more detail if there are any individual risks that might specifically apply to you.

Bleeding

If there is obvious bleeding from your wound site immediately after surgery, a nurse may simply put an extra dressing in place to help it stop. Very rarely another operation may be needed if the bleeding continues.

Seroma

Sometimes, after surgery, the wound continues to produce fluid under the scar, which cannot escape. The fluid may collect and cause swelling. This collection of fluid is called a seroma. It is quite a common problem after breast surgery and is not harmful in any way. You will notice that the wound becomes swollen under the scar or your armpit. A seroma can be drained by your Nurse Practitioner if it becomes painful, however it is better to allow it to reabsorb naturally when possible.
Cosmetic result
This operation will leave a permanent scar that will fade over time. The scar from this operation will extend across your chest from the middle near your breastbone to under your arm. This means there will be a ‘flatness’ on your affected side. If you would like to, your Surgeon can talk to you about the possibility of reconstruction and the options available in your individual circumstances.

Infection
All surgery carries a risk of developing an infection. This is rare but can be treated with antibiotics.
Alternative treatments

Sometimes women have a choice as to whether they have a mastectomy or a wide local excision (where only part of the breast is removed). Unfortunately in some cases the smaller operation is not thought to be the safest option, so your Surgeon may have to recommend that the entire breast is removed. This advice is never given without a great deal of thought and discussion.

If, having listened to the medical reasons behind the recommendation for mastectomy, you feel you cannot agree to this, your Surgeon and Nurse Practitioner can talk to you about other treatment options. These may include other treatments such as chemotherapy, hormone blocking treatments or radiotherapy. However, you must remember when exploring these alternatives that they may not be considered as safe for you as mastectomy. If you still find it a hard decision to accept, you may like to consider asking for a second opinion from another specialist.

Preparing for admission to hospital

Pre-admission clinic

You will need to come to a pre-admission clinic to ensure that you are as physically fit as possible before your surgery. Preparing for admission to hospital can be an anxious time. You will have the opportunity talk to your Nurse Practitioner about your diagnosis and surgery before your operation. Your pre-admission clinic appointment will be sent to you in the post.

Employment

If you work you will need to let your employer know how much time you need to take off to recover. Normally we advise you to take 3-4 weeks off work. If your job is particularly strenuous
or tiring, you may need longer than this. If you need a medical certificate (sick-note) for your employer, the ward staff can give you one that covers your stay in hospital and the expected recovery time at home.

**Caring responsibilities**
If you have responsibility for the care of someone and are anxious about this, it can be helpful to talk with your GP or Nurse Practitioner. They may be able to offer suggestions for help both during and after your admission. You will be able to look after yourself when you are discharged home but you may need help at first if you care for someone else.

**Living alone**
If you live alone you may be concerned about how you will cope after your surgery. Most people are able to manage at home. For example, you will be able to wash, dress, cook and do light household tasks for yourself. It might be advisable to make some arrangements for help with shopping or any heavier tasks for the first week or two.

**Admission**
You will be admitted to the Day Surgery Unit on the day of your surgery.
Before surgery

You will not be allowed to eat for 6 hours before the anaesthetic (this includes not chewing gum). You may sip water up to 2 hours before. You may be given a pre-medication 1-2 hours before your operation. This is to help you relax and reduce any discomfort and sickness you may experience after surgery.

A nurse will accompany you to and from the operating theatre. The operation usually takes 1-2 hours. You will also spend up to an hour on the Recovery ward immediately after surgery.

After surgery

When you return to the ward a nurse will regularly measure your pulse and blood pressure and will also check your dressings. You may have one or two wound drains in place for up to a few days after your surgery to remove fluid from the area. The nurse will check these as well.

The fear of experiencing pain after surgery is understandable. However, severe discomfort is uncommon. The nurse will ask you about your pain and give you the pain relief you need.

You may be worried about experiencing nausea and sickness but these side-effects are also not common. The nurse will ask you whether you are feeling sick and can give you anti-sickness tablets to stop or prevent this from happening.

The wound is closed using dissolvable stitches under the skin and either paper “stitches” (known as Steristrips) or surgical glue on the skin.

The day after your operation you will be more or less independent and able to get out of bed. The wound drains are
portable so you will be able to move around the ward with them in a small bag, which you can carry over your shoulder.

You will be shown some gentle arm exercises to prevent your shoulder from becoming stiff. You will be given an information booklet about these exercises to take home with you.

Your scar will still be tender when you come to leave hospital. It is important to continue to take regular painkillers until it is more comfortable.

You will normally stay in hospital overnight and will be discharged home the next day. It will take approximately 4-6 weeks for you to recover.

We encourage you to have a shower on the second day after your operation. If you have Steristrips over your wound it is fine for you to get them wet. Pat them dry with a clean, soft towel but do not rub the wound.

You may find that the Steristrips will gradually fall off before you come back for your post-operative appointment; if they haven’t we will remove them for you during the appointment.

**Prosthesis**

Before you are discharged home you will have the opportunity to be fitted with a lightweight breast shape (prosthesis) to wear inside your bra. Additional visits can be arranged with your Nurse Practitioner to fit you with a longer term prosthesis and for bra fitting and on-going support when you feel ready.
Follow-up

Your Surgeon will usually see you in the outpatients’ clinic two weeks after your surgery, to discuss the results of your operation. This appointment will be posted to you after you go home.

Support

This can be a frightening time, particularly as you may have had few symptoms and this might be your first time in hospital. There are various people who specialise in the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer who are available to give you support.

A Nurse Practitioner is a senior nurse who has carried out additional training to help when a diagnosis of breast cancer is made. We will give you the name and contact details of the Nurse Practitioner who will be your ‘keyworker’ and the main point of contact for any concerns you might have.

The Nurse Practitioner can support you from the time you first come to the breast clinic, through to diagnosis and afterwards if you need any further treatment. She works closely with the breast Surgeon and the other doctors and health care professionals involved in your care.

She will provide:

- Information about your diagnosis and its treatments. She can also give you information about financial and social support.
- Help with practical problems. This includes advice about body shape, clothing, wound care, skin care and pain relief.
- Emotional support.
How to contact us
Nurse Practitioners
Tel: 01865 235 773 (Oxford)
Tel: 01295 224 196 (Banbury)

Jane Ashley Centre
Churchill Hospital, Oxford
Tel: 01865 235 350 or 01865 235 360

E Ward
Horton General Hospital
Tel: 01295 229 239

Information and support groups

**Maggie’s Centre, Oxford**
Maggie’s offers free practical, emotional and social support to people with cancer and their families and friends.
Tel: 01865 751 882
Website: [www.maggiescentres.org/our-centres/maggies-oxford/](http://www.maggiescentres.org/our-centres/maggies-oxford/)

**Maggie’s CancerLinks**
Information and advice about many types of cancer.
Website: [cancerlinks.maggiescentres.org/](http://cancerlinks.maggiescentres.org/)

**Breast Cancer Care** – provide free information and one to one emotional support for you, your family and friends.
Tel: 0808 800 6000
Website: [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)

**Macmillan Cancer Support**
Provides information, emotional support and practical advice by telephone or letter for people with any kind of cancer.
Tel: 0808 808 0000
Website: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
Benefits advice

The Macmillan Oxford CAB Benefits Advice service is based in the reception area of the Radiotherapy Centre at the Churchill Hospital. They are able to offer advice and support to people with cancer and their carers and families, about financial and benefit issues.

This includes:
• checking eligibility for benefits
• help with applications and forms
• grant applications
• referrals to specialist advice services for housing, employment and debt advice
• information about and referrals to other sources of support.

They can give help over the phone, by email, at ‘drop-in’ sessions and by appointment, mainly at the Churchill Hospital but also one day a fortnight at the Brodey Centre at the Horton General Hospital. They can be contacted directly on 01865 227 083 or by e-mail at macmillan.oxcab@gmail.com
Local Support Groups

Bosom Friends
An opportunity for a confidential chat with someone who has had breast cancer. They also meet monthly in Oxfordshire.
Tel: 01844 290 362
Website: www.bosomfriends.org.uk

Brackley Support Group
Informal meetings are held monthly for women who have had breast cancer, offering support to each other.
Tel: 01869 810 735

Banbury Support Group
A small self-help group that offers practical and emotional support. Informal meetings are held monthly.
Tel: 01295 720 993

The Brodey Bunch
Bodicote, Banbury
A support group for young breast cancer patients. Meetings are held monthly and focus on issues that younger women may experience.
Tel: 01295 224 196

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221 473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

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