



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Discharge Advice Following Breast Reconstruction Surgery

Information for patients



This leaflet contains answers to some of the questions people most often ask when they go home. It is intended as a guide. If you have any other queries that are not answered here, please discuss them with your nurse or doctor.

Going home

You may feel concerned about the thought of returning home after your operation. Hopefully, during your stay with us your questions will have been answered. This leaflet has been designed by your nurses and doctors to give you support and guidelines about your recovery at home.

We feel it is important that you do not feel alone and isolated at home, so please call us on the contact numbers at the end of the leaflet if you have any concerns.

How do I look after my wounds?

The tape covering your stitch lines will gradually peel off. As it does, just trim any loose edges with a pair of scissors. Ask someone to help you if you are unable to see the area properly. When all the tape has peeled off, if your wounds have completely healed, you can help your scars to recover by massaging and moisturising them. Use any moisturiser, for example a simple aqueous cream (also known as E45).

You can shower as normal, but make sure you dry the stitch lines thoroughly afterwards. Initially it is better to shower rather than soak in the bath. If you chose to dry your suture lines with a hairdryer be sure to use the cold setting. Surgery can cause your skin to become numb and you may not be able to feel if the hairdryer is too hot.

The dissolvable stitches or staples under your wounds may come to the surface, where they "spit out". This can be uncomfortable. If you find this happens to you please contact us on one of the numbers at the end of this booklet and we will arrange for you to be seen in the dressing clinic. We can trim or remove the stitches that have come to the surface.

What issues should I watch out for after discharge from hospital?

You have already started on the road to a good recovery and we are confident that this should continue at home.

Sometimes, for whatever reason, people may develop minor post-operative complications. Please contact one of the numbers at the end of this leaflet if you experience any of the following:

- increase in pain, not controlled by prescribed pain relief
- red, angry looking skin around your wounds
- increase in swelling around your wounds
- feeling generally unwell (flu-like symptoms, temperature, nausea/vomiting, shivering)
- evidence of 'pus type discharge' from your wounds.

These symptoms may mean you have an infection which needs treatment with antibiotics.

There is also a chance of developing an accumulation of fluid around your wounds. This is known as a seroma. People often describe this as a "water-bed" feeling. If this happens, you will need to contact one of the numbers at the end of this leaflet so that we can arrange for you to come into the dressing clinic or ward to have it looked at. If it is causing you discomfort or we are concerned about infection we may suggest draining the fluid from where it has collected. This is a procedure that can be performed in clinic as an outpatient and involves using a needle and syringe to remove the fluid.

When you come to leave hospital you will need to have someone to accompany you. You should also make sure that you have some comfortable, loose clothes to wear on your journey home.

You should not go home on public transport and will need to be taken home by car. This will be more comfortable for you and also quicker for you to return to the hospital if there are any complications on the journey home.

What should I expect when I get home?

You may feel tired; this is normal after having major surgery. As soon as this initial tiredness passes you can look forward to gradually getting back to normal. You may feel a little discomfort from your wounds. Remember to take your prescribed pain relief and don't put up with pain, as the stress of this may slow down your recovery.

You may experience mixed emotions, having some good days and some bad days. Try to be patient, you will get better. You can go out, see friends and get back to normal home life, but gradually build up your walking and strength. For example, do not lift anything heavier than a full kettle on your affected side for 4 weeks and be careful with household chores like hoovering, washing and shopping. It can take up to 12 weeks to recover from a major operation, if not longer.

Your continued recovery

We highly recommend that you eat a high protein diet (such as nuts and dairy products) as this can help aid your recovery by giving you lots of energy. Continue to carry out the exercises given to you by your physiotherapist. You will be given a leaflet about these before you are discharged.

It is very important to make sure you stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water and keep moving around when you return home. This helps to prevent blood clots from forming in your legs (deep vein thrombosis or DVT). You will have been given a leaflet about this at your pre-operative assessment. It is important that you read this to know how to prevent and spot a blood clot if they occur. If you are concerned that you have signs of a blood clot you should seek urgent medical advice immediately.

There is also a useful 'App' available which has been developed by the Oxford University Hospitals Thrombosis Team, which can tell you more about what to look out for:

Website: www.vte-prevention.co.uk

What about work?

How quickly you return to work depends on what type of breast reconstruction you have had and what you do for a living. You can discuss this with your doctor before you are discharged. We will give you a sick certificate to cover the agreed period that you need to remain off work.

Driving

This also depends on the type of reconstruction you have had. Ask your nurse or doctor about this, either before you are discharged or when we see you at your follow-up appointment in Outpatients. You need to be able to safely control the car and carry out an emergency stop without hesitating. You may also need to contact your insurance company to check on whether you are covered to drive.

Going home checklist

- medication to take home with you, such as pain relief and your normal prescribed medication
- advice about restarting any medications that you have been asked to stop prior to your surgery
- information on the care of your wound drains (if applicable)
- details of your follow-up appointments with your breast consultant and/or plastic surgery consultant in the Plastic Surgery Outpatients Department
- sick certificate for your employer (if required)
- transport arranged – your own or hospital transport if necessary
- all of your belongings
- discharge letter for your GP
- be wearing a non-underwired bra/crop top/sports bra. You don't need to buy an expensive one and can usually be fitted for a proper bra after about 6 weeks.

Who to contact

Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurses:

Tel: **01865 234 193**

Email: **breastreconstructionnurses@ouh.nhs.uk**

Plastics dressing clinic

Tel: **01865 231 173**

Consultant's secretaries

Tel: **01865 231 065**

(8.00am-4.00pm, Mon-Fri)

Specialist Surgery Inpatient Ward

Tel: **01865 231 065**

Main John Radcliffe switchboard

Tel: **01865 741 166**

Ask to bleep the Senior House Officer or Registrar On Call, or bleep number 6521 (for the member of staff co-ordinating the specialist surgery ward).

Details of follow-up appointments:

- Plastics dressing clinic (ENT/Plastic Surgery Outpatient Department, LG1, West Wing, John Radcliffe Hospital):
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- Plastic Surgery Consultant:
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- Breast Consultant (if applicable):
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Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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July 2022

Review: July 2025

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