Your Breast Surgery Guide

Take to the hospital

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Aussi disponible en français
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Introduction

Coping with breast cancer and breast cancer surgery can be difficult. For many women it is a life changing event, one that can leave you feeling anxious, upset and scared. It may be comforting to know that you are not alone. These feelings can be hard to deal with but they are normal and common.

Remember that there is no “right way” or “wrong way” to deal with cancer and with surgery. Not all people react the same way or need the same kind of help.

Sharing your feelings and concerns with others can help. If you need to reach out at this time, turn to the section in this booklet called “Emotional recovery” to contact people who can help you.

The health care team at the Breast Health Centre has written this booklet to help you care for yourself after your surgery. We hope this booklet will answer your questions and concerns about your surgery and how it may affect you.

We encourage you to ask questions and discuss concerns with your surgeon, team members or your family.

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**After Surgery**

**Bruising, pain and numbness**

It is common for there to be some bruising and swelling around the incision site and breast after surgery. This will decrease within seven to ten days.

After surgery you may feel pain, numbness and tingling around the incision or in the shoulder or arm, or under arm if lymph nodes were removed. This is normal and may last a few weeks following surgery. Take pain medication as needed.

**Pain management**

It is easier to control pain by taking pain pills every four to six hours rather than waiting until the pain gets so bad that you have to take something.

Remember, you have had surgery. Be kind to yourself.

**Tylenol® #3** – Most patients take these for the first few days after surgery. Take one or two tablets every four to six hours as needed. Do not take more than eight tablets a day. This tablet contains codeine, which can cause constipation.

**Tylenol® Extra Strength** – As you heal, pain lessens and you can switch to these. These tablets do not contain codeine.

**Other** – If you are on another type of pain pill, take it as told by your doctor.

**Preventing/Treating Constipation**

- eat extra vegetables, whole grains and fruit
- drink extra fluids
- go for a walk every day
You may need to use a stimulant and stool softener such as Senekot - S®. This medication can be bought without a prescription. Speak to your pharmacist for more information.

**Diet**

After surgery you may go back to eating regular food as soon as you are able. Eat a variety of foods so your body can heal well. Eating well is also important to keep the immune system strong, help you be a healthy weight, lessen fatigue and keep your body healthy and strong during cancer treatments.

Having enough protein in your diet is important after surgery and during cancer treatment. Foods high in protein are meat and meat alternatives and milk and milk alternatives on Canada's Food Guide. Have a serving of at least one of these foods every time you eat a meal or snack.

Call the registered dietitian at the Breast Health Centre if you have any questions about diet, including supplements.

Phone: 204-235-3646
Toll-free: 1-888-501-5219

**Follow up visit**

You should see your surgeon _____ weeks after your surgery.

- If you saw a surgeon at the Breast Health Centre, call 204-235-3099 or Toll-free 1-888-501-5219 to make an appointment.
- Call your surgeon’s office if you were seen at another health centre.
Bandage over your wound (incision)

- Usually, the surgeons at the Breast Health Centre use dissolvable sutures (stitches). The sutures are under the skin and hold the edges of the incision together. The sutures dissolve or disappear over time and do not need to be removed. Steri-strips® (paper tape) are used to cover the incision on top of the skin. You can remove the Steri-strips® in seven days. They are easy to take off in the shower. A Band-Aid or dry bandage can be applied to any areas that are leaking. You will be told if you have sutures or staples that need to be removed by a nurse.

You may have one of these bandages. Ask your nurse to check off which one you have:

- You only have Steri-strips® over your wound. Keep them dry for 48 hours. After that you may shower. Remove the Steri-strips® in seven days.

- You have a gauze bandage over your Steri-strips®. Remove this bandage after 48 hours, but leave the Steri-strips®. After the gauze bandage is removed you may shower. Remove the Steri-strips® in seven days.

- You have a plastic bandage over your Steri-strips®. You may shower after 24 hours. Remove the bandage and Steri-strips® in seven days.

- You have a gauze bandage over your staples or sutures. Call your nurse or surgeon to have your staples or sutures removed in 10 to 14 days. You may have a shower but keep the bandages dry. Change the bandage if it becomes wet.
Showering

• You may shower 48 hours after surgery with the Steri-strips® in place even if you have a drain.
• If showering, do not aim or point the showerhead at your incision(s).
• Gently pat the site dry with a clean towel.

If you prefer a bath, keep the water lower than your waist, the incision and drain sites. Avoid soaking in any water (bathtub, hot tub, pool, etc.) until the incision has healed.

Do not apply soaps, powders, lotions, creams or deodorants to your incision while it is healing.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Call your surgeon’s office or the Breast Health Centre if you have:
• Any new bleeding from the incision
• Any foul or bad smelling fluid coming from the incision
• Increased warmth, swelling, pain or redness along the incision
• Chills or fever (above 38.5 C or 101.3 F) for two days or more
• Increasing pain, redness and your arm feels hot on the side where you had your surgery

If it is after clinic hours, a weekend or a holiday

• Go to the hospital emergency department where you had your surgery.
• If you live outside Winnipeg, go to your nearest emergency department.
Drain

You may have one or two small drains with a bulb. The nurse will show you how to empty the drain before you go home from the hospital. Drains should be emptied two or three times a day. It is important to wash your hands before and after emptying to prevent infection.

Measure the amount and write it down each time on the chart on page 9. You may create your own chart if you prefer.

Never separate the tubing from the bulb or container.

- The amount of fluid will slowly decrease.
- The colour may change from dark red to light pink to yellow.
- You may see blood clots in the drain tube.
- Most drains stay in place for seven to 10 days, but can be longer.

Your drains will be removed when the total amount coming out is less than 30cc in 24 hours.

Call your surgeon’s office or a nurse at the Breast Health Centre to have the drain removed. If you live outside of Winnipeg, you can call your health care provider for drain removal. If the total drainage in 24hrs is less than 30 cc over the weekend, you can wait until the next business day to call and make an appointment for drain removal.

The bulb should always stay squeezed (flat). The drain should be stripped (milked) before it is emptied. To do this, hold the tubing close to the skin. This anchors the tube and prevents pulling. With the other hand, pinch the tubing with your thumb and index finger. Then slide down the tubing, stretching the tubing a little at a time.
Visit our website to look at a video showing how to empty a Jackson Pratt drain and how to “milk” the tubing at - [www.wrha.mb.ca/bhc](http://www.wrha.mb.ca/bhc), click on Client Education/Resources, then Videos, then Drain Care.

**Bandage over drain site**

Ask your nurse to check off the one you have:

- You have a gauze bandage. Remove the bandage before taking a shower. After the shower, put on a new bandage. Before you shower, tape the tubing to your skin (on your stomach or leg) to decrease the pull from the drain on your skin.

- You have a gauze bandage. Change it in seven days or sooner if it gets wet. You may bathe but keep the bandages dry.

- You have a plastic bandage. Change it in seven days or sooner if it comes loose at the edges. You may shower or bathe.

### WHEN TO GET HELP

Usually problems with drains are non-life threatening and are not an emergency. Call your surgeon’s office or your nurse at the Breast Health Centre if:

- the drain bulb or container will not stay squeezed
- the tubing is blocked and there is a sudden decrease in the amount of fluid coming out
- fluid leaks around the tube; the bandage is wet
- you see increased swelling or feel fluid collecting under the skin
Measuring your drain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Noon</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Total In 24 hrs. for each drain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example Nov 12 –</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drain #1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 12 –</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drain #2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If you have two drains, record the amount of fluid in each drain separately. You do not have to wait for both drain total amounts to be less than 30 cc. The drains can be removed at different appointments.

IF IT IS AFTER CLINIC HOURS, A WEEKEND OR A HOLIDAY

If you have concerns about the drain or the area where the surgery was done
- Go to the emergency department of the hospital where you had your surgery.
- If you live outside of Winnipeg, go to the nearest emergency department.
Bras and prostheses (breast form)

Lumpectomy
If you had a lumpectomy, wear a comfortable, supportive bra after surgery. This is especially important during the day when you are active.

Mastectomy
Contact the Canadian Cancer Society at 204-774-7483 or Toll-free at 1-888-532-6982 for a temporary prosthesis.

You can be fitted for prosthesis when the incision has healed. This usually takes 4-6 weeks after surgery. You can contact the Breast Cancer Centre of Hope at any time for more Information about prostheses and the Manitoba Breast Prosthesis Program.

Phone: 204-788-8080
Toll-free: 1-888-660-4866

Activity
You may do any activity that you feel able to do. Many of your daily activities are exercises that are good for the arm, such as brushing your hair. You may also do light housework, such as dusting.

Go for a walk! Walking helps you recover. When walking, allow your arms to swing at your sides.

You may resume driving when you have enough movement in your arm that allows you to move quickly to react to traffic especially when steering. See next page for exercises that will help improve movement of your arm and shoulder.
AVOID anything that puts pressure or pulls on your wound. AVOID vacuuming, carrying groceries or other heavy objects. AVOID picking up children.

Talk to your surgeon, nurse or physiotherapist about when you can do these activities again.

When sitting or lying down, your arm should be supported on pillows. This may help decrease swelling and provide comfort. After surgery, it is important to begin an exercise program to improve the movement of your arm. Exercises will gently stretch the tight area to help the full movement to return in about six weeks.

**Exercises to improve movement**

Do your exercises in front of a mirror to ensure good posture and to compare the movements with your other arm.

Remember – all exercises should be done gently and be comfortable and without pain.

Start with these exercises once you are at home. Repeat each exercise one to two times. Slowly increase up to 10 times. These exercises should be done two to three times a day.

1. Sitting or standing with your arms at your side, shrug your shoulders. Relax.
2. Gently move your shoulders upward, backwards, then downwards. Relax.
3. Pull your shoulder blades together. Hold and then relax.
4. Arm lift: with your hands held together and your elbows straight, lift your arms up until a gentle stretch is felt. Hold for 15 seconds and then return to your starting position.
5. Hand exercises: squeeze a soft, small ball. This may help with the ache some people feel in their arm.

**More exercises - if there is no drain or after the drain is removed**

Repeat each exercise one to two times and increase to 10 times, if possible. These exercises should be done two to three times a day.

1. **Wall walking**
   a. Stand facing the wall. Keeping your elbows straight, slowly walk your fingers up the wall as high as you can. Make sure you are not just bending your elbows but that the movement is coming from the shoulders. Walking with both hands will maintain good posture. Hold for the count of 10 and then slowly walk back down. Relax. Do not be discouraged. One finger at a time is progress.

   b. Turn sideways from the wall. Keeping your elbow straight, slowly walk your hand up the wall as far as you can. Hold for the count of 10 and then walk the arm back down. Relax.

2. **Sitting on a chair**
   a. Raise your arm out to the side as high as possible. Keep your elbow straight. Hold for the count of 10 and then lower slowly.

   b. Raise your arm forward as high as possible. Keep your elbow straight. Hold for the count of 10 and then lower slowly.

   c. Place both hands behind your neck and bring your elbows out to the side as far as possible. Hold for the count of 10. Relax.
3. Using a large towel
   a. Using the good hand to hold one end of the towel at the back and the affected hand to hold the towel at the neck, gently pull the affected arm down the back in a drying-your-back motion.
   b. Change to the other hand and gently pull the arm on the side you had surgery up the back.

You should continue the exercises until you can move your arm normally. If you have any questions or concerns, contact your health care provider or nurse.

Visit our website to look at a video showing how to do these exercises - [www.wrha.mb.ca/bhc](http://www.wrha.mb.ca/bhc), click on Client Education/Resources, then Videos, then Before Breast Surgery Video, then Lymphedema and Arm Exercises.

**Lymphedema**

**Q:** **What is lymphedema?**
**A:** Lymphedema is swelling in your arm, breast or chest wall that may occur after breast cancer treatment. It is not the same as water build up (edema) and needs very different care.

**Q:** **What is lymph or lymphatic fluid?**
**A:** Lymph is a thin, clear fluid that flows throughout the body to help keep our body cells free from infection. The lymph flows through the lymphatic system and is filtered through lymph nodes in the armpit.

**Q:** **How is lymphedema related to breast cancer?**
**A:** When lymph nodes in the armpit are removed by surgery and/or damaged by radiation, the lymph fluid can no longer flow through its usual channels. If it does not find another
way, the lymph fluid builds up in the body cells and swelling results.

Q: Does everyone with breast cancer get lymphedema?
A: No. Most will not get lymphedema. It is something every person needs to know about after surgery and/or radiation. Health care providers cannot tell who will get lymphedema.

Q: How soon after surgery could I get lymphedema?
A: Lymphedema may happen soon after surgery or may not happen until years later. Sometimes an injury or infection may cause it.

Q: Can lymphedema be prevented?
A: No. The tips on page 15-16 will help you reduce your risk of getting lymphedema.

Q: Can lymphedema be cured?
A: No. Lymphedema is a chronic condition and cannot be cured. It can be managed with treatment.

Q: How is lymphedema treated?
A: Lymphedema treatments help the lymph fluid find other ways to move through the body. These therapies are:

a) Combined Decongestive Therapy includes manual lymph drainage®, compression bandaging, helpful exercises and skin care. This program requires daily treatment for two to four weeks.

b) Compression sleeve and glove are worn to control swelling.

c) Simple lymph drainage and exercises for self-care at home.
Watching for signs of Lymphedema

The start of lymphedema can be hard to notice, but it’s very important to treat it quickly. Tell your doctor right away if you notice swelling in your hand, arm or chest wall - even if it happens years after treatment. Some other signs to watch for are:

- feeling of fullness, puffiness or heaviness in your arm
- decreased movement in your hand, wrist or arm
- jewelry (including watches) feeling tight even though your weight hasn’t changed
- problems fitting into your sleeves
- redness or increased warmth, which may mean that you have an infection

Our knowledge about lymphedema is improving, and there is still much to learn. We do know that lymphedema cannot be prevented, but there are ways to reduce the risk. See list below.

Skin care
- Avoid trauma/injury and keep skin healthy to reduce the risk of infection.
- Use lotion as needed to keep your arm moisturized.
- Avoid cutting your cuticles (skin around the edge and bottom of the nail).
- Use sunscreen and insect repellant.
- Wear gloves when gardening or cleaning.
- Clean small cuts in the skin with soap and water. Apply antibiotic cream and cover with a Band-Aid. Bad cuts should be seen by a doctor.

Activity/lifestyle
- For the first few weeks after surgery, do not lift anything heavy (more than 10 pounds or 4.5kg) with the arm on the surgery side. Speak to your health care provider about increasing amount weight and activity.
• Do not strain your arm (rubbing, scrubbing, pulling or pushing).
• Take rest periods often during an activity.
• Slowly build up the length of time and amount of activity.
• Maintain a healthy body weight by following a well-balanced diet and exercising regularly.

Avoid anything tight on the arm on the surgery side
• Whenever possible, avoid using the arm on the surgery side for blood pressure or blood tests.
• Wear jewelry and clothing that is not tight.
• Avoid carrying a heavy bag over your shoulder on the surgery side.
• Avoid sleeping on your surgery side.

Compression garments
• If compression garments are needed, see someone who has special training to do this (certified garment fitter).

• Patients with lymphedema should consider wearing a well-fitting compression garment for air travel.

Temperature extremes
• Limit long exposure to heat, particularly hot tubs and saunas.
• Limit exposure to extreme cold.

Call your doctor right away if you see any signs of infection or inflammation such as redness, swelling or warmth on the arm on the surgery side.

Contact a lymphedema therapist at the Breast Health Centre if you have any questions or concerns about lymphedema:

Phone: 204-235-3684 or 204-237-2034
Toll-free: 1-888-501-5219
Visit the Canadian Lymphedema Framework at www.canadalymph.ca for more information on lymphedema.

**Emotional recovery**

There are many resources and supports available to you.

**Breast Health Centre**

A social worker at the Breast Health Centre may help you link to other resources as needed. The social worker may also help with financial concerns, talking to your family about cancer, finding hope and rebuilding your life and other concerns.

Phone: 204-258-1004
Toll-free: 1-888-501-5219

**Breast Cancer Centre of Hope (CancerCare Manitoba)**

Call the Centre to talk with a Breast Cancer Navigator or breast cancer survivors (peer support) who will give you information and support. They can help you and your family make decisions and help you cope with your illness.

The Centre has a lending library, a bra bank, and rural outreach programs. They can provide information about the Manitoba Breast Prosthesis Program. Call Breast Cancer Centre of Hope to arrange an appointment.

Phone: 204-788-8080
Toll-free: 1-888-660-4866.
Information online

The Breast Health Centre’s website has many resources that can help support you through treatment. Be sure to visit and bookmark www.wrha.mb.ca/bhc.

Did you know your food choices can help boost your energy and immune system while you’re in treatment? Visit our website and go to the Client Education/Resources page and click on “Nutrition Guide”.

We have a list of web resources and links for further information on many topics related to breast health, breast cancer, lymphedema, menopause and more.

Consider visiting these websites for information on programs and services related to breast cancer and breast health.

Breast Cancer Centre of Hope
www.cancercare.mb.ca/hope

CancerCare Manitoba
www.cancercare.mb.ca

Canadian Cancer Society
www.cancer.ca
This symbol, etched on the windows and door of the Breast Health Centre, represents the many paths individuals take on their journey to recovery and wellness.