

Information for patients

Breast cancer surgery

The following information explains what to expect from the moment you are admitted to hospital, to when you return home.

The information is intended as a guide only and your care and treatment may be changed according to your recovery. Responses to treatment may vary.

How long will I stay in hospital?

Most people stay in hospital for three to seven nights, depending on the type of surgery. Patients are discharged at 10am so the room can be prepared for another patient.

You are welcome to invite a support person to attend consultations with members of your care team during your stay in hospital.

What happens before my operation?

Before surgery some patients attend a pre-admission clinic where the doctor will explain the surgery and you will sign a consent form.

At the clinic, the health care team will ask you about your health, medication and lifestyle. They may test your blood, take x-rays and an electrocardiogram (ECG).

The staff will let you know about what to bring to hospital and when to stop eating and drinking before your surgery.

What will happen after my operation?

You will wake up from the anaesthetic in the recovery room, and be transferred to your ward shortly after. A nurse will monitor your blood pressure, pulse and temperature.

You will have an intravenous (IV) drip in your arm to give you fluid which will make sure that you are well hydrated. The drip will also provide you with any

medication if needed.

One or two drain tubes (about one centimetre in diameter) will help to drain any extra blood or fluid from your wound. Your nurses will measure the amount of drainage twice a day and will change the bag as required. The drain tube will be removed when the drainage output decreases.

You will be given daily injections of Heparin (an anticoagulant drug) to limit the normal clotting processes of the blood in the 48 hours following surgery.

If you are in pain, a nurse can give you tablets or an injection to help you feel better.

The day following your operation

You will be able to eat and drink and you will be encouraged to manage your personal hygiene, with assistance from your nurse if needed.

Your breast care nurse will visit you to discuss any concerns or emotions you may be experiencing.

A physiotherapist will visit you to explain arm exercises that you will need to do. The physiotherapist will also provide you with a sheet of exercises to continue at home.

St Vincent's at Home nurses will see you to discuss the first home visit which will be the day after you return home.

The remainder of your stay

Your surgeon will explain the results from the pathology test performed during your surgery. Your surgeon will discuss with you any further treatment or follow-up care that may be needed such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormonal therapy or further surgery.

Your breast care nurse will reinforce what your surgeon has told you and answer any questions you may have.

Advice on caring for your wound and the affected arm will be provided by the nurse. If appropriate, you will be able to discuss the use of a prostheses (artificial breast) with your nurse and they will be able to provide you with a temporary one.

Your nurse will also arrange for a Breast Care Support Service volunteer to contact you if you wish and make any necessary referrals to services such as social work.

You may have some discomfort near the surgery site and can expect some bruising to appear on your chest/breast. If the wound becomes tight, swollen or painful please tell your nurse, surgeon or breast care nurse.

At discharge you will be given:

- a medical certificate, if required (please ask)
- a follow up appointment with St Vincent's Specialist Clinics within one week of discharge
- a letter for your local doctor
- pain relief medication
- a list of contact numbers for support groups in your area
- dressing supplies for your nursing visits.

What should I do once I get home?

Continue to eat and drink normally, carry out your daily exercises as instructed by your physiotherapist and avoid driving until advised by your doctor.

For your safety, avoid doing any strenuous activity such as heavy lifting or sport, until advised by your doctor

Your doctor will advise you about returning to work.

If the glands under your arms were removed during the operation, familiarise yourself with lymphoedema (continual swelling of the tissues as a result of the absence of the glands) and caring for your arm.

You will not be able to have blood pressure or blood tests taken from your effected arm post gland surgery.

If you have any queries or concerns regarding your emotional or physical health, please talk to your breast care nurse or surgeon at any time. This will enable your care team to organise assistance to meet your needs.

Contacts

Plastics Unit and Breast Care Nurse

Tel: 9288 2211 (via hospital switchboard)

Liaison Nurse

Tel: 9288 4853

Waiting List Officer

Tel: 9288 2270

Cancer Council of Victoria

Tel: 9288 2270

This information sheet is intended as a guideline only. If you have further questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor.



ST VINCENT'S
HOSPITAL
MELBOURNE

Vascular Unit
PO Box 2900 Fitzroy
VIC 3065 Australia
(03) 9288 2270
www.svhm.org.au

Connect with us:

