



Patient Information – Post-operative care

Breast Cancer Excision & Sentinel Node Biopsy

Wound care

Your breast cancer & sentinel node(s) have been removed during surgery. The incision(s) have been temporarily numbed with local anaesthetic and sewn together with dissolvable stitches under the skin.

A dressing has been applied to the wound, often a skin adhesive and overlying paper tape such as Steristrips®. You can safely get the dressing wet in the shower and gently dab dry afterward. A soft non-wired bra or elasticised crop top will offer support and comfort to the breast wound, even at night when sleeping.

Sometimes an intra-operative injection of blue dye is used causing blue discolouration of the breast skin. This is excreted in the urine and faeces, causing a blue green colour. It will pass.

Pain relief

Regular paracetamol (e.g. Panadol®), 1g (two 500mg tablets), four times a day, for the first few days after leaving hospital and prior to exercises or functional activities, provides sufficient pain relief for most people. It is safe to add an anti-inflammatory drug (e.g., Nurofen®) for most patients, but please check with your doctor if you have any concerns.

Activity

Gentle exercise, e.g. walking, is recommended. You should avoid more vigorous exercise for at least a week after

surgery. You must not drive for at least 24 hours following a general anaesthetic. You may return to light duties including work after 24-48 hours in most cases.

Complications

Internal wound bleeding (haematoma) may be suspected if your breast becomes painful, tense, bruised or swollen. Soft bruising alone is of no great concern.

Infection may be suspected if the wound becomes increasingly tender & inflamed. You might start to feel unwell with a fever. This requires urgent attention.

A fluid collection (seroma) is common after lymph node surgery. The chest wall or armpit may become swollen and uncomfortable “like an egg under my arm”. Drainage with a needle and syringe is often performed in the doctor’s rooms after surgery, to relieve the fluid pressure.

Linear cords can sometimes be felt along the inside of the arm due to inflamed lymphatics just under the skin. This can be uncomfortable but will improve over the coming weeks or months. It is safe to exercise the arm with lymphatic cording.

Appointment

Your follow-up appointment will be made at the time of your surgery booking.

Please ring the rooms (03 9116 4770) if you do not have an appointment.

Any concerns, please contact Dr Sarah Birks or the hospital.