



PATIENT INFORMATION – POST OPERATIVE CARE

WIDE EXCISION BREAST CANCER AND SENTINEL NODE BIOPSY

Wound care

Your breast cancer and sentinel lymph node(s) have been removed during surgery. The incision(s) have been temporarily numbed with local anaesthetic and sewn together with buried dissolvable stitches. Dressings have been applied to the wound(s), often a skin adhesive and overlying paper tape such as Steristrips®. You can safely get the dressings wet in the shower, as it is important to keep the skin clean. A soft non wired bra, elasticised crop top or Tubigrip® garment will offer support and comfort to the wounds, even at night when sleeping.

Rarely 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 effluent. It will pass.

Pain relief

Regular pain relief of paracetamol such as 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 for most patients, but please check with your doctor if you have any concerns.

Activity

Gentle exercise, for example 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 to 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 and 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

Prior to leaving hospital, an appointment will be made for review within two weeks from your operation. Please ring Dr Joanna Morgan's secretary on **03 8202 5566** if you do not have an appointment.

Contact

If you have a concern, please contact the hospital, breast care nurse or Dr Joanna Morgan.