



## Department of Plastic Surgery

# Going home after your latissimus dorsi with implant

## Some advice on how to take care of yourself after breast surgery

### **Your wound**

When you are discharged you may be referred to your district nurse to check the wounds and dressings. We will also give you a hospital appointment to attend to check your wounds. Use water to clean the area around your wound. Do not use scented soap, talc, perfume or deodorant until your wound is fully healed. If you have been advised that you can shower, do not allow the full force of the shower water directly on to your wound. Check the temperature of the water before getting into the shower as the sensation in the breast area may be altered. If you still have dressings on, please make sure these are replaced. Most stitches are dissolvable and do not need to be removed.

You may experience some discomfort at first. Rest and taking a mild painkiller should help. If you experience severe discomfort or pain, contact your GP, ward or a surgical team member. (Phone numbers are on page 3).

Try to sleep in a slightly upright position in bed with the aid of pillows for the first couple of weeks to help reduce any swelling in your breasts.

When fully healed, it is helpful to rub a non-perfumed moisturising cream such as E45 into your wound to keep the skin supple.

### **Swelling**

You may notice swelling around the operation site. This may be a collection of fluid which is the same kind of fluid removed by any drains you may have had. It is not a serious problem and nothing you should worry about. However, if you experience any type of increasing swelling, please contact the ward or a member of the surgical team immediately.

### **Clothes**

You can wear normal clothes with a good supporting bra that is not under-wired or padded as soon as you feel able to. You should try to wear your bra for at least 6 to 8 weeks day and night. If your chest wall is swollen, tender or sensitive, a maternity sleep bra, crop top or vest may provide a little support until you are able to wear a proper bra again.

### **Work and house work**

You may feel tired at first and you are unlikely to be able to return to full work for several weeks, depending on what type of work you do and the rate of your recovery. You will need someone who can help you with cooking, cleaning, ironing and heavy shopping during this time, but you should not feel ill or need to stay in bed.

## **Leisure, sport and driving**

Build up your usual social activities gradually. You should not start strenuous physical activities involving your arm, such as swimming or going to the gym, for 8 to 12 weeks following surgery. Always ask your surgeon before you begin these activities.

Continue the shoulder exercises showed to you by the physiotherapist when you were in hospital for at least 6 weeks. They will help you to recover the movement in your shoulder.

Do not drive for at least 4 to 6 weeks following your surgery. In the interests of road safety, you must be sure that you can safely control your vehicle at all times, for example, be able to do an emergency stop safely. However, we advise that you check with your insurance company if you have an exclusion clause on your policy related to major surgery. Some insurance companies insist on a 'fitness to drive' report from your GP. Check with your doctor if you are in any doubt. You can also contact the DVLA for advice on [www.dvla.gov.uk](http://www.dvla.gov.uk) or call **0870 600 0301**.

## **Changes to your body following surgery**

Your 'new' breast may be tender, with some bruising and swelling at first. When your wound is fully healed and any bruising and swelling has settled, your wound should fade to a thin line outlining the breast area.

You will also have a wound site on the upper part of one side of your back, and there may be an indentation. This area may be swollen and bruised but will soon heal. You may feel restricted in moving and turning at first, so make a gradual return to your normal activities.

Due to the nature of the surgery, it is normal to experience some muscle twitching in your new breast. This can persist but usually settles in time.

Breast surgery will not affect your physical ability to have sex and you may resume as soon as you and your partner feel comfortable.

## **When to get help**

Contact your GP or surgeon immediately if you have any symptoms you were not expecting or if you experience any severe pain. Possible warning signs include:

- severe pain in your breast(s)
- an intense burning pain in your breast(s)
- unusual, unexpected or excessive swelling in or around your breast(s)
- a smelly or coloured discharge from your wounds
- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100°F) or more
- any lump or aching that is causing you concern.

## **Be breast aware**

It is still important to be breast aware after any type of breast reconstruction. Once your breasts have settled down get to know the way they look, then if you notice any changes in your breasts you should tell a member of your specialist team or GP as soon as possible. If there is any concern that your cancer has come back, your specialist may organize further tests. Some of the changes to look for are: a lump or lumpy area in or around the breast or armpit, a change in texture in and around the breast or swelling in the upper arm. (Breast cancer care)

## Where to get support and advice

### Contacts

If you are worried or upset or have any questions, do not think that they are unimportant or trivial, please ask about anything that worries you. Speak to your GP, or speak to your hospital consultant at your next clinic appointment.

If you have any concerns, please contact us on:

#### Secretaries:

- Mr Lambe **0161 918 7455**
- Mr Oudit **0161 446 3375**
- Mr Kosutic **0161 918 7054**
- Mr Mowatt **0161 446 3368**

Plastic surgery nursing team **0161 918 7586 or 7587**  
Ward 1 **0161 918 2157**  
Wendy Winn, breast reconstruction specialist nurse **0161 918 2196**  
The Christie Hotline **0161 446 3658**

#### Other useful numbers:

- Complementary therapy team at The Christie **0161 446 8236**
- Physiotherapists at The Christie **0161 446 3795**
- Psychotherapy and counselling service at The Christie **0161 446 8038**
- Cancer information centre at The Christie **0161 446 8100**

#### Further support and advice

- Breast Cancer Care  
Lines are answered by specialist nurses. Breast Cancer Care produces a range of booklets on breast cancer and its treatment which are free to patients. They also run a volunteer service where you can contact women who have already had breast cancer.  
Free phone: **0808 800 6000** (10am - 5pm, Monday to Friday)  
**[www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)**
- Cancer Aid and Listening Line  
This group provides support and advice, 365 days a year, to patients with cancer, their partners and families.  
Tel: **0161 205 7780**
- Macmillan Cancer Support  
Tel: **0808 808 00 00**  
**[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**
- DVLA  
Tel: **0870 6000 301**  
**[www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/vehicles](http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/vehicles)**

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **patient.information@christie.nhs.uk**

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For more information about The Christie and our services, please visit **www.christie.nhs.uk** or visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford.

Contact The Christie Hotline for  
urgent support and specialist advice

**The Christie Hotline:**  
**0161 446 3658**

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

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Withington  
Manchester M20 4BX

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www.christie.nhs.uk

The Christie Patient Information Service  
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