

Department of Plastic Surgery

# Going home after your TRAM/DIEP reconstruction - 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 onto 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 replaced after your shower. 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 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. Avoid sleeping face down for at least one month.

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.

## Hernia

There is a small risk that a hernia can sometimes develop following a DIEP/TRAM flap operation as the abdominal wall can be weakened. A hernia becomes noticeable as a bulge somewhere in the abdomen and can be painful when lifting or standing. Please discuss any of these symptoms with your GP or breast surgeon. If a hernia does occur it can normally be repaired with an operation.



## Clothes

You can wear normal clothes with a good supporting bra that does not have under-wires or padding as soon as you feel able to.

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 while 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(s) 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.

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
- red and inflamed breast(s)
- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100°F) or more
- any lump or aching that are causing you concern
- excessive bleeding

## 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 you should see your specialist team or GP as soon as possible. If there is any concern that your cancer has come back, your specialist may organise 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.

## Where to get support and advice

### Contacts

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
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 Now

Lines are answered by specialist nurses. Breast Cancer Now 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.breastcancernow.org](http://www.breastcancernow.org)

- 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.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **[the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net)**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



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