

After radical mastectomy

Radical mastectomy, where the entire breast is removed, is recommended for the treatment of breast cancer if the tumour is extensive. It is also the best alternative for women at risk of the recurrence of hereditary cancer or who have previously had radiation therapy to the breast area. During the operation, the entire breast, nipple and areola, as well as skin, is removed, leaving the chest wall smooth.

Wound care

The wound may become wet while taking a normal shower. If there is any wound tape, it may also get wet. If there is exudate from the wounds, remove the tape and shower the wounds daily. After showering, cover the wound with gauze if there is exudate.

You may only take a bath, go to the sauna or swim when the wounds are properly closed. You may apply deodorant under your arms once the wounds have closed.

Wound tape/stitches

As a rule, the wound is closed with absorbable stitches that do not have to be removed. If you have non-absorbable stitches, these will be removed by a nurse at your health care centre. Your doctor will tell you when the stitches should be taken out. Call your health care centre to make an appointment for the stitch removal.

You can remove wound tape 2 weeks after the operation.

Physical activity

Normal physical activity and light house work is allowed, but you should avoid exertion and carrying and lifting more than 3 kg with the arm on the operated side. Perform the arm exercises daily as instructed.

You may resume your normal physical and sports activities in about a month. You may drive a car as soon as you feel up to it, if your arm feels all right and there is no pressure on the wound area from the seatbelt. Your doctor will estimate how much sick leave you need.

Please note

Tissue fluid may accumulate in the wound area, resulting in swelling, a sense of tightness or pain. The fluid accumulating in the wound area may be removed by aspiration with a syringe and needle. If you need assistance, call the breast cancer nurse, Monday-Friday 8 am–3 pm, tel. 044 707 9755.

Wound pain

If there is pain in the wound area, you may take over-the-counter painkillers as instructed by the doctor.

Removal of lymph nodes

If you have had lymph nodes removed from your armpit, you should avoid damage to the arm on the operated side. Use protective gloves while doing housework or gardening. Dry skin is prone to lesions, which is why you should use skin lotion or cream on a daily basis.

There may be some swelling in the arm after surgery. The arm on the operated side must not be used for blood sampling or blood pressure measurements. Vaccinations or other injections should not be given in the affected arm while you are recuperating.

Breast implant

You may start using a soft temporary breast prosthesis in your bra right away. You will be given one by a nurse when you are discharged. If the wound is very sore, you can first put on a cotton T-shirt and then your bra. Once the wound has healed properly, you can start wearing a silicone prosthesis, available through the Cancer Society. You will receive a voucher for a breast prosthesis by post.

If you are scheduled to have radiation therapy, you may only start using the silicone prosthesis once the radiation therapy has been completed.

Follow-up appointment

The follow-up appointment is about 2 weeks after the operation at the Surgery Outpatient Clinic. You will be told about the results of biopsies taken during surgery and any further courses of treatment at this visit. You will be informed of your follow-up appointment time and given instructions when you are discharged.

You should talk to your doctor before using any medications that contain hormones.

Examine your breasts regularly and inform your doctor of any changes.

Please contact, if there is

- increasing pain, warmth, redness or swelling in the wound area
- foul-smelling discharge from the wound
- or if you develop a fever

Contact information

Surgical ward 3
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