

- ◆ Always wear oven gloves when taking hot food from the oven.
- ◆ Use insect repellent to avoid insect bites especially when abroad.
- ◆ Use high factor sun screen to protect the arm from sunburn.
- ◆ Use depilatory cream or an electric razor to remove underarm hair. Do not use a razor blade or wax.
- ◆ Avoid having injections into or blood samples taken from the arm at risk.
- ◆ Avoid having blood pressure taken on that arm.
- ◆ Use moisturising cream on your arm to prevent the skin becoming dry or cracked.

If you develop swelling or your arm becomes red or hot or a cut looks as if it is becoming infected contact your G.P. as soon as possible .

If you have any questions or would like more information or advice contact the breast care nurses on 0161-611-3113 or the ward nurses on 0161-291-2943

Author Christine Salamone

Going home after axillary node clearance

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

**Women's Health Suite
Ward C1**

Swelling after your wound drains have been removed

You may notice a swelling under your wound or arm after your drain has been removed, this is a collection of fluid, the same kind that is removed by drains you may have had. If this happens contact the ward and they will give you a time to visit. This fluid can easily be removed by inserting a very small needle just below your wound. This is not a serious problem and nothing to worry about. Sometimes patients with this fluid collection need to visit the ward several times before it settles down.

Your arm and chest wall

You may have some discomfort in the inner part of your upper arm, this is because of a nerve that has to be divided during your operation. It is common to experience tingling, numbness and shooting pains in this area. These should become less severe with time. Quite often the arm becomes more stiff and painful about ten days after surgery than in the first few days. It is very important to keep doing your exercises through this period of stiffness. You may find it useful to take painkillers 20 minutes before starting the exercises. You should continue with the exercises for six weeks after the operation.

Lymph nodes

Removal of lymph nodes (or lymph glands) in the armpit is an important part of the treatment of breast cancer. You may have either one node removed (sentinal node biopsy) 3-4 nodes (axillary sampling) or all of the nodes (8-4- a full clearance.) Your surgeon will have already discussed with you what operation you will be having.

Lymph fluid

Lymph is a colourless fluid formed in the tissues of the body and normally drains back into the circulation system through a network of lymph vessels and lymph nodes. The lymph nodes act as a filter and help as a defence against infection. This means you will always be at slightly more risk of getting infection in the arm or hand on the affected side.

Lymphoedema

When you have surgery or radiotherapy to the breast and armpit, your arm, breast and / or chest may become swollen. This swelling is a normal part of the healing process, it usually settles within a few weeks and is nothing to worry about. Although all women who have axillary surgery are at risk of lymphoedema the risks are higher if all the lymph nodes have been removed

In a small number of women swelling of the arm and/or hand remains or can occur at a later date. This can happen months or even years after your operation. This is called lymphoedema. It occurs when the lymph drainage system becomes less efficient as a result of scar tissue forming after surgery or radiotherapy.

To help prevent lymphoedema it is important that from now on you take a little more care of the arm on the affected side.

- ◆ Use your arm normally but avoid heavy lifting or carrying very heavy items with the arm at risk.
- ◆ Continue to do your exercises 3 or 4 times a day for at least 6 weeks after the operation.
- ◆ Try to avoid cuts and scratches. If they do occur wash them and apply an antiseptic cream.
- ◆ Always wear gloves and long sleeves when working in the garden and rubber gloves when doing very dirty or rough work.