



personal experience professional support

Breast Cancer Care is here for anyone affected by breast cancer. We bring people together, provide information and support, and campaign for improved standards of care. We use our understanding of people's experience of breast cancer and our clinical expertise in everything we do. Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call our free helpline on **0808 800 6000**.



A confident choice

Breast prostheses,
bras and clothes
after surgery



Contents

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Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call our free helpline on **0808 800 6000** (for Typetalk prefix **18001**). Calls may be monitored for training purposes. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and Breast Cancer Care.

A large print version of this booklet can be downloaded from our website, www.breastcancercare.org.uk. It is also available on audio CD or in Braille on request. Call **0845 092 0808** for more information.



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Introduction

This booklet provides practical information and suggestions about breast prostheses (artificial breast forms), bras and clothes for women who have had breast surgery. It may also be useful for women whose breasts are naturally different from each other in size or shape.

It does not provide information on breast reconstruction. For that, please see our booklet, **Breast reconstruction**.

Many women wonder how they will cope emotionally and practically after breast surgery if they have lost all or part of a breast. You may feel that you have lost your 'normal' body shape and this can be frightening and upsetting. Reactions like this are very natural and it may take time for you to feel comfortable with the changes to your body.

We hope this booklet will address many of your concerns, but if you have further questions or want more information, contact our helpline on 0808 800 6000. You will also find details of our prosthesis fitting service on page 31, together with a list of bra, prosthesis, clothes and swimwear suppliers on page 34.

Breast prostheses



What is a prosthesis?

A breast prosthesis is an artificial breast form that can fit in a bra cup or specially formed 'pocket' to replace all or part of the natural breast. They are mostly used by women who have had all or part of their breast (or both breasts) removed as treatment for breast cancer. 'Prostheses' is the word for more than one prosthesis.

Every year thousands of women will wear a prosthesis for the first time. However, you may feel that you don't want to wear one. If you prefer not to wear a prosthesis, then you do not have to. Page 27 suggests adjustments to your clothes you might wish to make if you do not use a prosthesis.

Most breast prostheses are made from soft silicone gel encased in a thin film. They are moulded to resemble the natural shape of a woman's breast, or part of a breast. The outer surface feels soft and smooth, and may include a nipple outline. The surface that rests against the skin varies, and you can choose one that feels most comfortable to you (see page 12).

'I was quite happy not wearing prostheses (I have had a double mastectomy) but my breast care nurse converted me with a great bra and light ones that I wear most of the time. I reluctantly admit that it does improve my self-esteem.' Barbara

First weeks after surgery

Breast surgery (or even radiotherapy) can make your chest area feel extra sensitive. You will usually be unable to wear a silicone prosthesis until the scar area is fully healed, so you will be given a fabric-covered prosthesis (a 'softie' or 'cumfie') to wear during this time. You may find that the softie rides up because it is so light. It may look better if you adjust the stuffing and either pin or stitch it to the bottom of your bra cup.

When wearing a bra with your softie, try one that is quite soft and stretchy. This may be one you already own but it needs to be easy to put on because your shoulder may be stiff at first. Our booklet, **Exercises after breast surgery**, has advice on exercises to help ease stiffness.

Your scar area is likely to heal completely within about six to eight weeks. Once it is fully healed, you need to make sure you have a well-fitting, supportive bra before you can be successfully fitted for your permanent prosthesis. This is so that your prosthesis matches the shape and size of your natural breast, and is held comfortably and securely in place. You can read more about finding a suitable bra on page 17.

Getting your prosthesis

If you are an NHS patient, your breast care nurse will arrange a fitting appointment for your permanent prosthesis. Your breast care nurse may do the fitting herself or it may be done by another trained fitter, such as a surgical appliance officer or a representative from a prosthesis company.

A list of **Standards of care for breast prosthesis fitting services**, which sets out best practice, is on page 37. You can ask your fitter if she knows about these. They are intended to help people understand what to expect from a prosthesis fitting service, and to be a useful guide for prosthesis fitting providers in developing their services.

You might find it helpful to look at some prostheses before your appointment, or even before your operation, so that you have an idea of what to expect. You can ask your breast care nurse about this.

Once you have had your fitting, you will usually be given the prosthesis that day or very soon afterwards. However, if you choose a style that is not in stock, you may have to wait for longer – usually up to two weeks.



If you are a private patient, you can ask your medical team or breast care nurse where you can have your prosthesis fitting. Although it is not advisable to buy a prosthesis without first trying it, they are also available through mail-order catalogues and from some high street shops.

Breast Cancer Care also provides a prosthesis fitting service in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Details are on page 31.

Do I have to pay?

NHS patients do not have to pay for their prostheses. If you have private health insurance, check to see if your scheme covers the cost of your prosthesis. Prostheses vary in price, starting at around £85. You won't have to pay VAT if you sign a form stating that you have had breast surgery. If your private health scheme does not include the cost of a prosthesis, you may be able to obtain one from the NHS in the same way that NHS patients would apply for a replacement (see page 14).

'The fitting was with a nurse I had met several times while having treatment. It helped to be with someone I knew. She had a lot of experience and it helped that I didn't feel rushed.'

Rachel

'The fitter was kind and assured me that I would be able to wear my prosthesis with fashionable bras.'

Lydia

The prosthesis fitting

At the fitting for your first prosthesis (and, later, for replacement ones):

- you should have sufficient privacy
- you should be able to check for yourself in a mirror what the prosthesis looks like in your bra, and with clothing over it
- there should be a selection of products
- there should be enough time for you to make the right choice.

Your prosthesis should feel comfortable, give you a good shape and be a reasonable match for your skin colour.



You may be anxious and upset about having a prosthesis fitted and it is fine to talk about this at your fitting appointment if it helps you to feel more relaxed. However, some women feel that their fitter is unable to provide emotional support, or does not understand their concerns. You may find talking through any concerns or anxieties with your breast care nurse helpful, or you can talk to our Peer support service (see page 32 for more details).

What to take with you

- A well fitting bra (see page 17).
- A plain, light-coloured top. This makes it easier to choose a prosthesis that gives you a good shape. You might prefer to wear a top that can be taken on and off quickly and easily.

'If you wear a close fitting top in Lycra to your fitting, you can see how well you "match up". It's really important for your confidence to be even!'

Joyce



Colours for different skin tones

Prostheses are made to match many skin tones. Having a prosthesis that is close to your skin tone can help you feel more comfortable and confident. If you are not happy with the range of skin tones shown, you can ask your fitter if there is anything more suitable in another range.

Due to the difficulty in adding colour to lightweight silicone, it is not always possible to provide lightweight prostheses in darker tones. A cover in a darker tone may be available from the prosthetics manufacturer.

Shape, size and weight

Breast prostheses come in various shapes and sizes, which do not relate directly to bra cup sizes. It is important that your prosthesis suits your lifestyle needs as far as possible.

Some prostheses are suitable for wearing on either side, while others are shaped differently for the left and right sides. Some prostheses are fuller at the back, for women who have had more tissue removed. You should be able to choose a shape that suits you with guidance from your prosthesis fitter.

'If you don't like the first prosthesis you go home with, tell your breast care nurse and get it changed. I tried a couple before I got one I really felt comfortable with.' **Julie**

'I initially cried quite a lot, especially when the prosthesis was too big and too heavy. But now that I have a good fit, I feel good and I'm still "me". I haven't changed.' **Lydia**

Silicone prostheses come in three main weights:

- full-weight prostheses weigh about the same as natural breast tissue
- lightweight ones are about 15 per cent lighter
- extra light are about 35 per cent lighter.

A full-weight prosthesis may make you feel more balanced as it matches the weight of a natural breast. However, if you need a large size, a lighter-weight version might be more comfortable. Lightweight prostheses are particularly good for older women, whose breast tissue has become lighter as a result of normal ageing, and women with lymphoedema (swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid in the surface tissues of the body).

Sometimes a prosthesis can ride up so that it is not level with the natural breast. This can occur because it is too light. Don't be afraid to discuss this with the person who fitted your prosthesis as you may need to be reassessed, or get some advice about wearing a different type of bra.

'I wear quite a large prosthesis, and recently tried a very lightweight one. I couldn't get used to it and felt quite lopsided and unbalanced, so returned to my usual weight stick-on one.' Sue

'As I am a small framed lady, I needed a prosthesis that fitted my frame, but still kept in line with my cup size prior to surgery.' Carol, bilateral mastectomy

Backings and covers

The backing of most prostheses is made of the same material as the front. Some have a different backing, such as fabric or a soft panel of gel, designed to increase comfort. Backings that can be moulded to fit an uneven chest wall are also available.

It is possible to use a fabric cover or a bra pocket to cover the silicone surface. Some prostheses are provided with a soft fabric cover, although you may have to order one separately. If you want one, you can ask your fitter.

In general, you will get a better-looking fit by not using a cover, but there are benefits to having one. For example, they can prevent a rash or skin reaction developing, which might occur if you get hot and sweat behind your prosthesis. (If you have a rash that does not settle down, you should talk to your breast care nurse about it.) If you find that air sometimes escapes from behind your prosthesis and makes a noise, a cover should prevent this too. This does not happen with all prostheses, so if you find this is a problem, you could mention it when you are reassessed (see page 14).

'Stick-on prostheses don't suit everyone but I would never choose anything else. The weight is attached to the chest wall and it feels very natural and balanced.' Sue B



'I continued with the prosthesis I was issued with as I planned to have reconstruction and didn't really see the point in shelling out even more money in the quest to have something different. When all was said and done, the prosthesis I had was functional and served its purpose.' Nicole

Different types of prosthesis

There are several types of prosthesis available apart from the standard full prosthesis.

Partial prosthesis

A partial prosthesis is for women who have only had part of their breast removed. It is worn inside the bra and is shaped to fill out the breast outline. It is made of the same silicone material as most full breast prostheses. Some have a stick-on backing. Sometimes a breast enhancer can be used instead. These are not provided by the NHS but can be bought from prostheses manufacturers and high street shops.

Shell prosthesis

This is a form of partial prosthesis which may be used if your breasts are very different from each other in size. It is a soft 'shell' of silicone that fits over a breast. The prosthesis is placed over your smaller breast so that it matches the larger one. Shell prostheses are made in various sizes and thicknesses and can be used following breast surgery, as well as for women who have breasts that have naturally developed in two very different sizes. This type of prosthesis can also be useful for women

who have had breast reconstruction surgery where symmetry has not been achieved, or if an implant is in the process of being expanded.

Stick-on prosthesis

This may be a full or partial prosthesis. It sticks directly to your skin and is removed at night. Most women will be advised not to wear one in the six months or so following surgery, or during radiotherapy, as it may damage the skin. Stick-on prostheses can suit women who are very active, or who wish to wear a less supportive bra as not all of the weight is taken by the bra. They can also be worn with a strapless dress if support is provided in the dress.

The stick-on surface varies between manufacturers and any cleaning instructions must be followed carefully. Some have a sticky surface as part of the prosthesis itself. Others have a separate sticky part that can be used at times of your choice.

'It took a few days for the skin to adjust to having a self-adhesive substance applied directly onto it, but using the correct aftercare, your skin adjusts well and I have had no problems.' Carol

Swim prosthesis

This is made especially for use when swimming or doing sport. It may be available from the NHS, but more commonly you will have to pay for it. You can also use your normal silicone prosthesis for these activities but after swimming it should be rinsed and dried as soon as possible.



'I bought myself swim prostheses which are excellent and no one knows I have had a double mastectomy.' Heather

Foam 'leisure' prosthesis

This is a soft, lightweight, inexpensive prosthesis made from foam placed inside a cover. It is not normally available from the NHS, but can be bought through mail-order companies. If you sometimes use the softie you were given after surgery to be comfortable when doing things like relaxing at home, you may like to try a leisure prosthesis instead, as it gives a better shape than the softie. It can also be used for swimming although not in chlorinated water such as a swimming pool.

'I still get self-conscious but am getting more relaxed. I must feel fairly confident in my swimwear as I go to Aquafit and change in the communal changing rooms.' Lydia

Prosthetic nipples

These are artificial nipples that come in different sizes and skin colours. You can stick them onto your breast prosthesis or reconstructed breast. At some hospitals, you can have a nipple custom-made to match the nipple on your other breast. This is particularly useful if you have a very raised nipple on your natural breast. Alternatively, you might find it easier to use a nipple shield (cover) on the natural nipple to make it look less obvious. You can buy these from specialist suppliers and some high street shops.

Looking after your prosthesis

In general, you need to look after a silicone breast prosthesis as you look after your own skin. You should wash it daily in warm soapy water and dry it with a towel. It can be used in salt water and chlorinated water, but should be rinsed in clean water as soon as possible afterwards. Please note that 'stick-on' types have different care instructions that should be followed closely.

You need to take care not to puncture a silicone prosthesis. See the page opposite for more information. When you aren't using it, it is advisable to store it in the shaped unit in the box it came in.

Replacing your prosthesis

Your prosthesis will have a guarantee but the length of this can vary. Some prostheses may last for three or more years before they need replacing, which may be longer than the period of the guarantee.

The NHS will replace your prosthesis when it is damaged or worn out. You can have a reassessment if your prosthesis is no longer a good fit, even if it is still in good condition. This might happen if your body weight or shape changes, or your lifestyle alters (for example, if you've become more active). You can also be reassessed in other specific circumstances such as if you have problems with your wound healing or with scar tissue, or if you need surgery on the other breast.

'I have had six different prostheses over the years. Each time they needed replacing there was something new which I thought was better. Also I have put on weight so have needed to increase the size.' Sue

You can contact your breast clinic to arrange a prosthesis reassessment and fitting, or ask your GP for a referral to the breast clinic or prosthesis fitter if you no longer attend checkups. New prosthesis styles are developed frequently, so when you need a replacement it is a good idea to have a reassessment rather than directly replacing the one you already have. If the style you like is not in stock, the fitter can order it.

If you had private surgery but are entitled to NHS treatment, ask your GP to refer you to an NHS breast clinic or prosthesis fitter to be fitted with a free replacement prosthesis. Overseas residents treated in the UK will have to pay for a replacement.

Damaged prostheses

If your prosthesis is damaged due to a manufacturing fault, you should be reassessed and given a free new one if you are an NHS patient. If it is damaged because you have punctured it or not followed the care instructions, you may be charged for its replacement. If you puncture your prosthesis, the sticky gel inside will be exposed, although it will not flow out. This is harmless and you can repair it temporarily with waterproof sticking plasters.



A suitable bra

The diagram below is a guide to help you choose a bra that will be suitable for wearing with a prosthesis. If you already have a bra that fits well and has all the features shown, you may not need to buy a new one. Your breast care nurse or prosthesis fitter can check your bra to see if it will be suitable.

If you do not have a suitable bra, you will find it helpful to be properly measured and fitted before buying a new one. Some hospitals recommend that you are fitted for your bra before your surgery, but don't worry if this is not possible. You do not need a prosthesis when being fitted.

Firm or medium support

Good straps

Good separation between cups, and not too low

Good depth under the arm

Underband at least 1cm deep



Firm or elasticated upper edge to cup

Full cups, to cover prosthesis

At least two hooks to fasten at back, more in larger sizes



'I was well fitted at my local department store. The fitter seemed to have all the time in the world for me and wouldn't let me leave with a bra that didn't fit.' Nairi

Getting fitted and buying a bra

Specialist lingerie shops, chains or department stores usually have experienced bra fitters with whom you can make an appointment in advance. An experienced fitter has usually had specialist training and seen women who have had breast surgery.

Before going for your bra fitting, you may like to let them know that you are going to have (or have had) breast surgery. The fitter can advise you on bra styles to suit your overall shape and size, and your lifestyle.

Some women are happy to find a suitable bra without any assistance. However, if you are unable to find a bra that is comfortable and the right size, your breast care nurse may be able to recommend other shops or you could look at mail-order catalogues (see the list on page 34).

It is a good idea to buy just one bra at first, in case it turns out to be uncomfortable or unsuitable; for example, if the cup does not cover the prosthesis well enough or in case your

weight, and therefore bra size, changes. You could keep the bra in its packaging until you have your prosthesis fitting so that you can change it if you need to.



The fit of the bra

A new bra should fit well on the loosest set of hooks. This means that when it begins to stretch after it has been worn for a while and washed, you can tighten it and still get a good fit.

If you have had one of your breasts completely removed (a mastectomy), the bra needs to be a good fit for your natural breast. You will need a bra that is not cut too low, otherwise the top part of the prosthesis will show above the top edge.

If there is little difference in the size or shape of your breasts following breast conserving surgery, you will probably not need to wear a prosthesis. However, your breast area will still be sensitive and you may have difficulty finding a comfortable bra. Bras with more elasticity in the fabric, and that do not have wires, may be best. If your breasts are different from one another in size or shape, the bra needs to be fitted to the larger breast. You could use a padded bra and adjust the padding on one side.

If you have had both breasts removed (a bilateral mastectomy) and you are going to be wearing two prostheses, you can choose the bra cup size you want to be. You will need to adjust the straps so that

the bra cups are about halfway between elbow height and your shoulder.

A bra made of materials such as cotton, and microfibre (a 'breathable' material with a soft touch, which is often combined with Lycra) will help keep you cool.



'When I am physically active I have no problems as I always wear a good, supportive pocketed bra. However, by the evening I'm always glad to take it off!' Joyce

Suitable bra styles to wear with a prosthesis

There are many styles of bra suitable to wear with a prosthesis, including underwired bras, sports bras, and pocketed 'mastectomy' or 'prosthesis' bras. A mastectomy bra has a pocket sewn in across the back of the cup, into which you can slip the prosthesis, usually from the side.

Mastectomy bras are exempt from VAT if they are bought by someone who has had breast surgery. The order forms on most mail-order catalogues will have a box you can tick so that you don't have to pay this tax. If you are buying a mastectomy bra from a shop, the procedure for not paying VAT can vary. Check with a member of staff before paying for your bra. In some shops, you may need to show a note from your GP to prove you have had a mastectomy. Your doctor may charge a fee for providing this type of letter.

If both your bra and prosthesis are comfortable and fit well, you may find a pocketed mastectomy bra is not necessary. However, you may wish to wear one if you are worried that your prosthesis may move or fall out when you bend forward.

You can also adapt an ordinary bra by sewing in a piece of stretchy material loosely across the back of the cup, or you can have this 'pocket' sewn in for a small charge by some mail-order companies or high street shops. Some NHS hospitals will put a pocket into two or three bras free of charge. It is worth noting that if a pocket is too tight, it can spoil the bra's shape when it is holding the weight of a prosthesis. Another alternative is to sew in two strips of evenly spaced ribbon, from the top to the bottom of the cup.



'I found that I could wear a wide range of styles with my prosthesis; however, pocketed bras were good for hot weather, giving added security when the adhesive on the prosthesis may 'unstick' slightly.' Carol

Clothes and swimwear



It is common to feel anxious about your appearance after surgery and worry that none of your clothes will look the same. However, with time, most women find that this is not the case and become more confident in knowing what works for them and what makes them feel comfortable.

Clothes

The information and suggestions below will be of particular use to women who wear a prosthesis. However, they may also give ideas to women whose breasts differ from one another in shape or size but who don't wear a prosthesis.

'There is some lovely lingerie, underwear and swimwear out there that is exquisitely feminine, comfortable and confidence boosting.' Nicole



'Always try a garment or swimsuit on. With a little alteration most things are possible to wear.' Mary

Strapless and 'strappy' clothes

Some strapless tops and dresses or 'strappy' clothes (with narrow straps) have enough support in the bra area for you to wear a silicone prosthesis without a bra. If you want to wear a top or dress that does not provide enough support, you could try:

- pinning a soft fabric prosthesis (softie) directly inside the garment
- placing a softie or very light prosthesis in a strapless bra or in the support structure of the top or dress

- wearing a bra with transparent or decorative straps
- using a stick-on prosthesis if the top or dress provides good support
- using a stick-on prosthesis with a strapless bra.

'I was given a stick-on prosthesis by my hospital as I got married eight months after my mastectomy and I really wanted a strapless wedding dress. It was superb.' Julie



Low necklines

Many women like to wear low necklines, with some of the cleavage area exposed. If you want to wear these styles while disguising surgical marks, you could try some simple ways of covering part of your chest area. This will enable you to continue to wear your favourite clothes without changing them too much. For instance, you could wear:

- a camisole or vest top underneath a V-necked top so that it is visible across the 'V'
- a camisole-style bra, available from specialist catalogues, made with lace inserted between the cups that will cover the cleavage area
- a lightweight lacy or semi-transparent top worn over a low-necked item, to disguise the cleavage area while still allowing the clothing beneath to show through
- a draped scarf, or flowers pinned on the side that needs extra coverage
- lace or fabric inserted to raise a neckline
- chunky or sparkly necklaces.

Low or revealing backs

You can buy special bra-strap extensions from mail-order catalogues. Instead of fastening at the back, these continue round and fasten lower down at the front, to enable you to wear clothes with low backs. If a dress or top is reasonably supportive in the chest area, you could try using a stick-on prosthesis, or pin in a softie, without wearing a bra. You can also buy bras with straps that can be crossed at the back, which will enable you to wear tops with cut-away shoulders.

'I wasn't going to let having a mastectomy change the way I dress. I always made an effort before but I probably make more effort now to wear nice clothes. I'm always the one who'll be dressed up.' Rachel

Sleepwear

If you want to wear a prosthesis in bed, you could consider:

- a 'sleep' bra or very soft, low-support bra with a softie
- a camisole or nightdress with a softie pinned in place
- pocketed nightwear, available from some catalogues
- wearing your silicone prosthesis in bed. However, this might be rather uncomfortable and would need greater support than a softie
- a stick-on prosthesis. This usually needs to be worn with some support, but you may find it stays in place sufficiently on its own.

'In bed I wore nothing before and I wear nothing now! I'm as free as a bird – it's the only time I get to be the real old me.' Joyce

Going without a bra

If you find bras uncomfortable and prefer not wearing one, you can still adjust your clothes and wear them with a prosthesis if you want to. You could try:

- pinning a softie into underwear such as a vest top or camisole, or a tankini top from a swimwear range
- wearing a very soft, low-support bra – such as a 'teen' bra or a 'sleep' bra – with a softie. Teen bras come in different sizes, mostly with small cups and for quite small body frames. Sleep bras are very soft bras designed to be worn at night, which are available from some mail-order catalogues
- using a stick-on prosthesis with clothing that has good in-built support
- wearing pocketed clothing, available from some mail-order catalogues. These clothes are usually designed to be worn with a silicone prosthesis. You might wish to try them on first and see if they work well for you.

It is worth remembering that going without a bra after a mastectomy for long periods can cause pain and discomfort in your neck, shoulders and back, especially if your remaining breast is large.

Going without a prosthesis

You may feel strongly that you do not want to wear a prosthesis at all. Many women will feel fine with how this looks, but others may wish to make some adjustments to their clothes.

If you have had one of your breasts removed, you can make the two sides of your body seem more balanced by wearing dark, patterned fabrics and loose fitting clothes. If you want to distract the eye further, you could wear overshirts, jackets, scarves or bold or chunky jewellery.

If you want to disguise a small difference between your breasts without using a prosthesis, a well-fitted padded bra gives a good shape.

If you have had both of your breasts removed your chest area will be symmetrical. Many women feel happy with how this looks but you could also try some of the ideas above.

'I have had both breasts removed and I have the best of both worlds. I can be flat and wear nice little tops, especially in the summer, or I can wear my "boobs" [prostheses] and feel sexy.' Heather

'I suspect that people do not necessarily notice the lack of a breast. If they do it should be a useful education for them.' Flavia

Swimwear

High street swimwear

Some high street shops sell suitable swimwear, including one-piece and two-piece costumes. The top needs to be cut high enough over the breast area and under the arms to cover the prosthesis. It also needs to have some structure, which is usually provided by cups.

You could adapt a high street swimsuit with cups by making your own pocket to hold the prosthesis in place, or simply by stitching two strips of ribbon from top to bottom across the back of the cup.

Looking ahead

Everyone has different feelings about their body and how they look after breast surgery. It is important to remember there is no wrong or right way to feel. For some women, it will not be an important issue. However, it is also perfectly natural to have concerns. For example, you may wonder how friends and family will react, or what people might say when you return to your everyday activities such as work.

By taking simple measures you can become more confident about your body and how you look, which may affect other areas of your life in a positive way. These measures might include having a suitable prosthesis fitted, choosing an attractive, well fitting bra, or making some adjustments to your clothes. Small changes could make all the difference to how you feel. What is important is that you can make your own choices and find what is most comfortable and works best for you.

Further support

Recovering emotionally from breast cancer surgery can take some time. Each person's response is different so don't worry if you feel you are not coping as well as someone else you know in a similar situation. You may feel isolated or have a sense of uncertainty. This is perfectly normal.

Some hospitals have support groups, where you can talk to other women and find out what has worked for them. Your breast care nurse will be able to tell you if there is a support group in your area.

If you add ribbon, you will need to wear a lightweight prosthesis or a foam leisure prosthesis (see page 13). Special swim prostheses are available from mail-order catalogues but these can be quite expensive. Also, some may be too heavy to wear in a swimsuit that has not been designed for use with a prosthesis.

Mastectomy swimwear

You may prefer to wear pocketed 'mastectomy swimwear', which you can find in some high street shops, large department stores or specialist shops. There is also a large range available in mail-order catalogues. Most is cup-sized. It comes in one-piece costumes and two-piece bikinis and tankinis. You can use your regular silicone prosthesis or a swim prosthesis in a mastectomy swimsuit.

Remember, you do not need to pay VAT on mastectomy swimwear if you have had breast surgery (see section on VAT on page 21).

'I bought a mastectomy swimsuit which was really comfortable. But I thought it was very expensive when the only difference was the pockets.'

Julie





Beyond this booklet

Further support from Breast Cancer Care

Free telephone helpline 0808 800 6000 (for Typetalk prefix 18001)

Our helpline provides information and support for anyone affected by breast cancer. Everyone on our helpline either has personal experience of breast cancer or is a breast care nurse. The team comes from a variety of backgrounds, so callers get to talk to someone who understands the issues they're facing.

The team is able to talk about clinical, medical and emotional issues surrounding breast cancer and breast health. Everyone on the helpline has an excellent knowledge of breast cancer issues and receives daily information on new developments. They can talk through the complexities of different treatments to help you understand your options and explain the best way for you to get treatment.

Prosthesis fitting service

We have a prosthesis fitting services in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh, where you can have a free one-to-one fitting by appointment. You will be able to find the prosthesis that you like and fits you best, look at bras, swimwear and accessories, and discuss your concerns and feelings about breast surgery. (Please note that we can advise you about your prosthesis but we do not sell them.)

We have produced a list of **Standards of care for breast prosthesis fitting services**, which sets out best practice. You can read these on page 37.

Telephone support groups

Get together once a week to talk with people who've been there. Linked together by phone in comfortable surroundings, you can express your feelings and discuss the practical and emotional impact of living with breast cancer. Groups are facilitated by a professional therapist and a breast care nurse to ensure everyone is fully supported. Call the helpline for more details.

Volunteer support

Many people who have breast cancer find it helpful to talk to someone who has been in a similar situation. Our peer support service puts you in touch with someone who has personal experience of breast cancer and has been trained to listen and offer emotional support. You can talk to someone at any stage – whenever you feel it would help. Call our helpline or visit our website for more information about this free service. You can also contact our centres to access these services (contact details on the inside back cover of this booklet).

Courses and activities

We run courses and activities for people with breast cancer, which aim to provide information and support and give people the chance to meet others in a similar situation. For more information about these events, contact your nearest Breast Cancer Care centre or call our helpline.

Online discussion forums and Live chat

Our website hosts discussion forums covering all aspects of the disease and its treatment. This service is available 24 hours a day and allows you to talk to people in a similar situation to you and to share your thoughts and feelings.

All forum users post their messages and responses at any time, however the regular Live chat sessions take place among users who are all logged on at the same time. They are hosted by our staff or a clinical specialist and give you the opportunity to discuss anything related to your diagnosis. Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk for more details.

Ask the nurse

This is another service on our website. You can email a question on any breast cancer or breast health issue and our team of specialist nurses will reply promptly. The service is strictly confidential.

Publications

We produce a wide range of publications providing information for anyone affected by breast cancer. All of our publications are regularly reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer. You can order our publications by using our order form, which can be requested from our helpline. All our publications can also be downloaded from our website.

**Looking good, feeling confident:
some of our real-life models take
to the catwalk at the 2008 Breast
Cancer Care Fashion Show**



Suppliers: bras, prostheses, clothes and swimwear

Below are just some specialist suppliers of bras, prostheses, clothes and swimwear for women who have had breast surgery. Please note that this is not a complete list and Breast Cancer Care cannot guarantee the quality of the services or products provided by these companies. Your hospital may sell specialist bras and swimsuits.

Note about products

The term 'accessories', which are sold by some of the companies listed, covers items such as sew-in pockets, bra strap extenders, nipple covers, prosthetic nipples, and prosthesis carrying cases. They vary between suppliers. All of the prosthesis suppliers listed have some prostheses in a range of skin tones.

Amoena (UK) Ltd

Freephone: 0800 072 8866 (enquiries), 0800 072 6636 (orders)

Email: agmaor@amoena.com
Website: www.amoena.com/uk

Products: specialist bras and swimwear, and prostheses
Availability: catalogue, mail order, fitting service/shop in Eastleigh, Hampshire (by appointment).

Anita UK Ltd

Telephone: 020 7435 2258
Email: anita.gb@anita.net
Website: www.anita.com

Products: specialist bras and swimwear, and prostheses
Availability: no mail order; available from several of the catalogues listed here, and some shops. Full details of product range available on their website.

Betty and Belle Ltd

Telephone: 0161 929 1472
Email: info@bettyandbelle.co.uk
Website: www.bettyandbelle.co.uk

Products: mastectomy bras, swimwear, tops and prostheses
Availability: stock available in shop and mail order service, ring for brochure.

Bouncing Back

Telephone: (Monday–Friday, 10am–2pm) 0191 477 9449 or 07973 562175
Website: www.bouncingbackbras.co.uk

Products: pocketed bras, swimwear and summer tops
Availability: shop, mail order, website and home visits (within 25 miles) for disabled people as the shop has a steep flight of stairs.

Bravissimo

Telephone: 01926 459859
Website: www.bravissimo.com

Products: bras and swimwear in large cup sizes, some clothing
Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop, several high street shops.

Contura Belle (Thamert/Silima)

Telephone: 01295 257422
Email: info@conturabelle.co.uk
Website: www.conturabelle.co.uk

Products: specialist bras, swimwear, accessories and prostheses
Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop.

Eloise

Telephone: 0845 225 5080
Email: sales@eloise.co.uk
Website: www.eloise.co.uk

Products: specialist and unpocketed bras, swimwear, clothing, prostheses, accessories
Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop, fitting service/shop in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

Lingerie Illusions Ltd

Telephone: 01902 482524
Email: info@lingerieillusions.co.uk
Website: www.lingerieillusions.co.uk

Products: free measuring and fitting service, non-wired and wired pocketed bras, swimwear, scarves and accessories
Availability: shop, online and telephone orders.

Little Women

Telephone: 01455 274411
Email: enquiries@littlewomen.co.uk
Website: www.littlewomen.co.uk

Products: small cup bras, some small cup swimwear
Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop.

Nicola Jane

Telephone: Enquiries/orders 0845 095 2121, Chichester shop 01243 533188, London shop 020 7253 7841, Leeds shop 0113 258 7900
Email: info@nicolajane.com
Website: www.nicolajane.com

Products: specialist pocketed bras and pocketed swimwear, prostheses
Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop, pocketing service, fitting service/shops in London, Leeds and Chichester.

Royce Lingerie Ltd

Telephone: 01295 265557

Email: sales@royce-lingerie.co.uk

Website: www.royce-lingerie.co.uk

Products: non-wired pocketed and unpocketed bras

Availability: catalogue available but mail order via online shop only. Also available from other websites, catalogues and some shops.

Trulife

Telephone: 0114 261 8100

Email: info@trulife.co.uk

Website: www.trulife.co.uk/womenshealthcare.html

Products: mastectomy bras, prostheses, accessories

Availability: catalogue, mail order.

Womanzone

Telephone: 01925 768992

Email: sales@woman-zone.co.uk

Website: www.woman-zone.co.uk

Products: specialist, made-to-measure swimwear, plus some bras, prostheses and accessories

Availability: catalogue, mail order, online shop, fitting service/shop in Warrington.

Cancer organisations

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment,
London SE1 7UQ

Telephone: 020 7840 7840

Macmillan CancerLine: 0808 808 2020

Cancerbackup Helpline 0808 800 1234

Textphone: 0808 808 0121

Email: cancerline@macmillan.org.uk

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support improves the lives of people affected by cancer by providing practical, medical, emotional and financial support, and campaigning for better cancer care. Their Cancerbackup Helpline team can provide up-to-date information on diagnosis, symptoms, treatments, clinical trials and more. The Macmillan CancerLine provides information and emotional support. Other services include cancer information booklets, Macmillan nurses and a website.

Standards of care for breast prosthesis fitting services

During 2005, Breast Cancer Care asked people who have had breast cancer about their experiences of NHS/private and other prosthesis-fitting services. We also asked them to describe the essential features of a good-quality fitting service.

From this we produced **Standards of care for breast prosthesis fitting services** which have been developed with people with breast cancer, breast care nurses and others who fit prostheses. We hope the standards will help people understand what they can expect from a prosthesis fitting service, and be a useful guide for prosthesis fitting providers in developing their services.

- 1** People who have had surgery for breast cancer, other breast surgery, or whose breasts differ naturally from each other in size or shape **should be entitled to be fitted with an appropriate prosthesis.**
- 2** All women should have the choice of seeing a **female fitter.**
- 3** The fitting environment should be **welcoming, accessible, private and comfortable.** The room should have disability access, suitable seating for those with mobility problems, appropriate lighting and temperature, a mirror for the upper body and seating for any companion.

- 4 People should be entitled to **see and try a range of prostheses** (including partial prostheses) to find one that offers a balanced shape and as close a match for skin colour as possible.
- 5 All fitters should be **well trained** in prosthesis fitting, and should be **sensitive** to people's specific needs and concerns.
- 6 During the fitting people should feel they have **time and opportunity to discuss** any feelings they may have about the change in their body.
- 7 People should be informed **how long they may have to wait to receive their prosthesis** if it is not available on the day.
- 8 Fitters should explain and provide written information on **how to care for the prosthesis** according to manufacturers' instructions.
- 9 People should receive impartial information about buying **alternative breast prostheses** from other providers and **other relevant products** such as bras, pockets for bras, swimwear, prosthetic nipples, as well as general advice on clothes.
- 10 All fitting services should supply **clear guidelines for prosthesis replacement**. People should be informed that they can be reassessed for a new prosthesis if they experience problems due to, for example, manufacturing fault or significant change in breast size.

These standards have been endorsed by the Royal College of Nursing Breast Care Nursing Society.

Would you like more information?

To find out more about Breast Cancer Care and the free services we offer, please fill in your details below and return this slip to:

**Breast Cancer Care, FREEPOST RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG,
5-13 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0NS**

Your details

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

please tick if you are happy to receive emails from us

I am a (please tick)

person who has/who has had breast cancer

friend/relative of someone with breast cancer

healthcare professional

other (please state) _____

Please complete reverse of page

Please let us know where you got this Breast Cancer Care publication.

Breast Cancer Care will not pass your details to any third party.

From time to time we may wish to send you further information on our services and activities.

Please tick here if you don't want to hear from us.

free helpline 0808 800 6000

www.breastcancercare.org.uk

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Breast Cancer Care is committed to equal opportunities and access for all.

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For all breast cancer or breast health concerns call our free, national helpline on **0808 800 6000** (for Typetalk prefix **18001**) or visit **www.breastcancercare.org.uk**

Confidentiality is maintained between callers and Breast Cancer Care.

Donations from the public make it possible for us to provide publications like this one free to people affected by breast cancer. If you would like to make a donation, please send your cheque to: Breast Cancer Care, RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG, 5-13 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0NS. Or donate via our website at www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Central Office

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Fax 0845 092 0820
Email info@breastcancercare.org.uk

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Telephone 0845 077 1892
Email sco@breastcancercare.org.uk

Wales, South West and Central England

Telephone 0845 077 1894
Email cym@breastcancercare.org.uk

East Midlands and the North of England

Telephone 0845 077 1893
Email nrc@breastcancercare.org.uk

London and the South East of England

Telephone 0845 077 1895
Email src@breastcancercare.org.uk