Your guide to breast prostheses

If you have had a mastectomy or feel that your breast is smaller following your breast surgery you will be offered a breast prosthesis. This leaflet has been produced to provide you with information about breast prostheses and aims to answer any questions that you might have. If you have any further queries please contact your Breast Care Nurse.

Q1. What is a breast prosthesis?
A1. A prosthesis is an artificial breast shape which is worn inside a well fitting bra. Prostheses may be temporary- soft ‘comfies’ to wear immediately after your operation or foam shapes to wear for swimming. Permanent prostheses are made of silicone and match the size, weight and shape of your own breast. These are all worn externally and are not breast implants.

Q2. Do I need a prosthesis?
A2. Many women feel very self-conscious after their mastectomy. You may worry that other people can tell what operation you have had and that your clothes do not look right. This is normal and may be helped by wearing a prosthesis which restore your shape and can help you feel more confident.

Some women choose not to wear a prosthesis because they have adjusted to their new body shape. You may want to talk to your Breast Care nurse or partner about this and you can always change your mind.

Men can choose to have prosthetic nipples if they wish.

Q3. So what happens next?
A3.  
- While you are in hospital recovering from your mastectomy one of the Nurses will give you a soft temporary prosthesis (‘comfie’) to wear in your bra for the first few weeks while your wound heals.
- Your first permanent prosthesis will usually be fitted about six weeks after your operation, but this may vary depending on other treatments that you may be recommended to have.
- Your Breast Care Nurse will give you a form to take to the Appliance Office in the New Victoria Wing Outpatients of the RVI when you are ready for your first permanent prosthesis.
- The Appliance Officer will explain about the types of prosthesis available and she will make you an appointment to come to the Breast Prosthesis clinic, which is in the Appliance Office area. Here you will be seen by one of the female Specialist Fitters from Peacocks.
Q4. What choice do I have?
A4. The fitter will discuss your personal requirements and show you the range of prostheses available. She will help you choose the best style and size for you.

There is a wide choice of silicone breast prostheses available free on the NHS. Breast prostheses are designed to be worn next to the skin and most are held securely in place by a well fitting bra. You do not need to buy special mastectomy bras but you do need a bra that is full cupped and fits you properly in order to hold the prosthesis in place. Many local shops and department stores sell bras that are suitable and many offer a free measuring and fitting service.

Several mail order companies supply mastectomy bras and swimwear but these can be more expensive. Please ask your fitter or Breast Care Nurse for further details of these.

If you are worried about the prosthesis falling out then you can contact the Appliance Officer at the RVI who can arrange for Peacock’s to fit pockets into your bra or swimsuit to hold it in place. You can have up to six pockets fitted free in the first year after your operation and up to three pockets each year after that.

There are also adhesive prostheses available that stick to your skin. They are not suitable for everyone and the fitter will discuss with you whether or not they would be suitable for you. They are not recommended for women with very sensitive skin or for those with skin conditions such as eczema. If you are having radiotherapy or chemotherapy they cannot be worn until the treatments are completed.

Q5. What happens if I am having chemotherapy?
A5. You can wear a permanent prosthesis while you are having chemotherapy but an adhesive one cannot be worn as it can cause severe skin reactions if worn during this time. It is not possible to issue you with a permanent prosthesis to wear in your bra during your chemotherapy and then an adhesive one at the end of your treatment.

If you have chosen an adhesive prosthesis this will not usually be given to you until your chemotherapy is finished. You can continue to wear your ‘comfie’ until you are ready to have an adhesive one fitted.
Q6. What happens if I am having radiotherapy?
A6. If you are having radiotherapy it is advisable not to wear any permanent prosthesis until this is completed as the prosthesis may irritate the skin in that area making it red and sore. Your permanent prosthesis will not usually be given to you until your radiotherapy is finished. You may continue to wear your ‘comfie’ until you are ready to have a permanent one fitted.

Q7. How do I look after my permanent prosthesis?
A7. It is important to look after your prosthesis to prevent damage. Treat it as you would your own skin. Handle it gently, washing it daily with soap and water and drying it carefully. When you are not wearing it store it in its original box away from direct heat.

If you have an adhesive prosthesis it must be cleaned thoroughly using only the solution provided. When you run out you will need to buy more as replacement solution is not available on the NHS. You must not use soap and water to clean this prosthesis as this destroys the adhesive and they cannot be replaced because of damaged adhesive.

Take care not to catch the prosthesis with sharp objects such as rings or brooches as these may damage it causing the silicone to leak. If it is damaged you can seal the tear with a sticking plaster until you can seek advice from the Appliance Officer.

Q8. What about taking part in sports etc?
A8. There is no need to stop taking part in any activity or sport that you enjoy; this includes making love, swimming etc., although you may be nervous about this at first. The prosthesis will not be damaged by any of these activities and if you wear a good supportive bra such as a sports bra, then the prosthesis should not move around when you are doing anything energetic. You may find that pockets fitted to your bra will help you feel more secure.

Mastectomy swimsuits are available with pockets already fitted to hold your prosthesis in place but these can be more expensive. The Appliance Officer can arrange for you to have pockets fitted to a standard good quality swimsuit. A swimsuit with a built in cup is best for this. Your prosthesis is waterproof and neither chlorine nor salt water will harm it. Some women prefer to wear a foam shape for swimming or sunbathing as these are lighter and may be more comfortable in hotter climates. These can be bought from Peacock’s.

Care must be taken when wearing an adhesive prosthesis as sun creams or suntan oils, even in the pool, can affect its stickiness.
Q9. How do I get a new one?
A9. Your prosthesis should usually last two to three years but it may be replaced if you lose or gain a lot of weight. If you have problems with it or need to have it replaced please contact;

Appliance Officer at the RVI, Monday to Friday 9-4pm
Tel; 0191 2824011.

Contact details

Your Breast Care Nurse:
Tel: 0191 2820207 / 8
Office Hours: 8.30am – 4.30pm

Email:
Sandra Scott   Sandra.Scott@nuth.nhs.uk
Kathryn Kay    Kathryn.Kay@nuth.nhs.uk
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Further information is available on the hospital website:
www.newcastle-hospitals.org.uk