

Mastectomy for breast cancer

These instructions are intended for printing. The instructions contain sections to be filled in.

Procedure

The operation is performed under general anaesthesia. A radioactive tracer is injected into the breast on the morning of the operation to detect sentinel lymph nodes. Sentinel lymph nodes may also be traced by using a blue dye, which may stain your urine blueish green. The lymph nodes taking up the tracer are removed as samples, and sent to the pathologist for examination during the operation. If a metastasis is found, a wider axillary lymph node excision is performed. A drain is inserted into the wound at the end of the operation.

Recovery

You can move about as soon as you feel up to it after surgery. During your sick leave, you should avoid strenuous physical exercise. To avoid swelling and problems with moving the shoulder joint, you should perform the exercises instructed by your physiotherapist. You will receive the instructions on discharge from hospital. You will also be given a temporary breast prosthesis.

Wound care

You can remove the thicker wound dressings and take a shower on the day after surgery. The wound is closed with absorbable stitches. The wound tape can be removed after one week. Going to the sauna, taking a bath, and swimming are allowed two weeks after surgery. Drain should be removed at your own health Centre according to your surgeon's instructions, but not later than 7 days after surgery. Some fluid may be trapped in the wound area after this. It can be drained with a needle and a syringe on your follow-up visit to the Surgical Outpatient Clinic. If the operation area collects a lot of fluid that disturbs, any doctor can drain it in your own health Centre or you can contact nurses at the Surgical Outpatient Clinic, telephone (06) 213 1533 for the procedure. If there are no signs of infection, the drainage is not an urgent procedure, and no laboratory tests are necessary.

Pain management

A local anaesthetic agent is often injected into the wound at the end of the operation to reduce postsurgical pain. You are recommended to take painkillers regularly for 1–4 days and after that when necessary.

Paracetamol

Anti-inflammatory analgesic

Other medications

A follow-up visit at the Surgical Outpatient Clinic is usually scheduled for 3–4 weeks after the operation. You will be given the final results of the samples at this visit.

Sick leave is usually required for 3–4 weeks after the operation, depending on the type of surgery performed and your occupation.

Contact us

If you experience signs or symptoms of infection (increasing pain, heavy swelling, heat, redness, drainage of pus from the wound) or other problems, please contact the treating unit.

Day Surgery Unit, Monday–Friday, 07.00–15.00, telephone 06 213 1552

Your own health Centre or occupational health unit

Telephone nursing services from 15.00–08.00 on Monday–Thursday and from 14.00–08.00 on Friday and 24 hours a day during weekends and on midweek holidays, telephone 116 117