

# Mastectomy

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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## What is breast cancer?

## What is a mastectomy?

A mastectomy involves removing all of your breast, usually including your nipple. As well as removing your breast tissue, your surgeon may remove lymph nodes in your armpit to find out if there are any cancer cells in them.

Although a mastectomy involves removing all your breast, it is possible to have breast reconstruction to recreate a breast shape. This can be performed at the same time as the mastectomy or in a later procedure.

## What are the benefits?

Removing the cancer by surgery gives you the best chance of being free of early breast cancer. The breast tissue and lymph nodes that your surgeon removes will be examined under a microscope to help decide on any further treatment.

## Are there any alternatives?

If you have invasive breast cancer there are other treatments available such as hormone therapy, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and biological therapy.

Sometimes it may be possible to remove the cancer with a rim of breast tissue around the cancer, instead of having to remove all your breast tissue.

## What does the procedure involve?

The procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic and takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will make an oval (elliptical) cut on your breast to include your nipple.

Your surgeon will tell you before the procedure if they need to remove any of your lymph nodes. If they do, they will remove them from your armpit through the same cut.

Your chest on the side of the procedure will be flat. Your wound should heal to a faint line across the side of your chest.

## What complications can happen?

Some may be serious and can even be life threatening.

### General complications of any procedure

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical wound
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Venous thromboembolism
- Chest infection

### Specific complications of this procedure

- Developing a lump under your wound caused by fluid collecting
- Developing a lump under your wound caused by blood collecting
- Numbness or continued pain around your armpit or the inner part of your arm
- Skin necrosis, where some of the skin at the edge of your wound dies leaving a black area
- Stiff shoulder
- Arm weakness or swelling of your arm and hand

### Consequences of this procedure

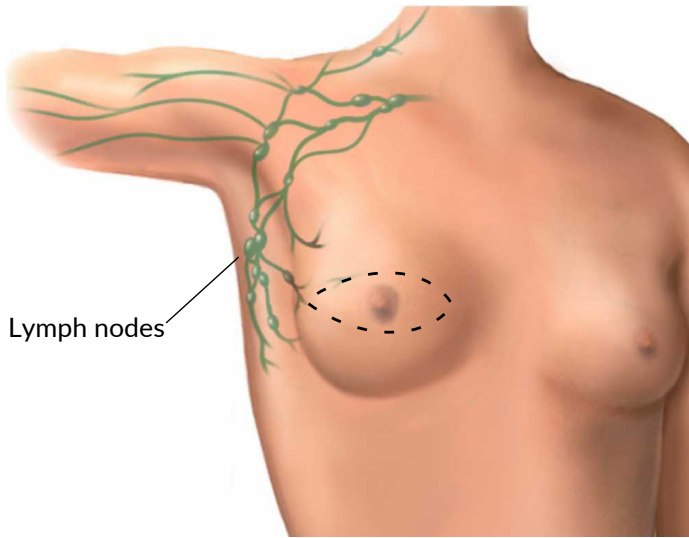
- Pain
- Scarring of your skin

## What happens after the procedure?

You should be able to build up to normal activities after 2 to 3 weeks.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the breast-care team or your GP for advice.

The breast tissue and lymph nodes that your surgeon removed will have been examined under a microscope. Your surgeon will tell you the results, check on your wound, and discuss with you any treatment or follow-up care you need. They will also be able to tell you when you can return to work.



An elliptical cut

## Summary

Surgery gives the best chance of you being free of early breast cancer. A mastectomy involves removing all your breast tissue. It usually involves removing some or most of the lymph nodes in your armpit, which helps your surgeon to decide on any further treatment.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

## Acknowledgements

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### Illustrator

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