

PREPARING FOR YOUR HOSPITAL STAY

Preparing for cancer surgery can be a busy and stressful time, particularly when you have a number of health appointments. This information sheet will help you to prepare for surgery and a hospital stay, discharge after surgery and recovery at home

What can you and your family do to prepare before surgery?

It is important to take some time to rest and recover when you get home from breast cancer surgery so preparing your home and family in advance can really help.



Looking after yourself

- Keep up your exercise routine, eat well and get some rest before your surgery.
- You may have to visit a number of specialists and clinics. Stay organised and keep your appointment information, hospital letters and correspondence in one place. If you are unsure about an appointment, contact your breast care nurse.
- It's important to take note of the location of the clinics you are booked to have each procedure. For example, sentinel node mapping or a hookwire procedure may not be at the hospital where you plan to have surgery.
- Front-opening tops and bras may be recommended after surgery. You can find these at shops like Kmart or Farmers. Ask your breast care nurse if you need one.

Involving family and friends

- Identify the person best able to help as you prepare for and recover from surgery. Talk to them about what type of help you think you will need.
- Ask someone to take you to the hospital and pick you up when you're discharged.
- Most people find it helpful to have a single space for communicating information about their treatment with whānau and friend. It's often easier to set up a group chat, such as Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger or email, and post updates there as needed. You or your support person may want to do this. Some families also organise a group roster to make sure someone is always available to provide support.
- Ensure a caregiver knows where your hospital letters, health information and medications are stored, in case you need them in an emergency.

Preparing the household for the weeks after surgery

- Arrange for some help with household tasks and cooking for the initial period after your surgery.
- Prepare extra meals and freeze them for those days when you don't feel like cooking. This is especially helpful if you have young children as you can freeze small portion sizes.
- If you store frequently used items in high cupboards or shelves it may be a good idea to temporarily move these down to a lower shelf so you don't have to reach up high in the first few weeks after your surgery.
- You won't be able to drive for a few days or weeks after surgery, so you may need to organize help with school drop-off and pick-ups for a few weeks.

Your hospital stay

The amount of time you spend in hospital and your after-care will depend on a number of factors. These include whether you are having a lumpectomy or a mastectomy.

A lumpectomy will usually involve discharge on the same day as your operation whereas a mastectomy requires at least a one-night stay in hospital. If you are having breast reconstruction at the same time as your mastectomy, your stay will be longer. Your surgeon or nurse will advise you on how long your hospital stay will be. If you have a pre-assessment appointment scheduled, you can ask about this and other questions.

Clothing and toiletries

- Sleepwear: Separate (top and bottom), front-opening sleepwear is preferable for easy changing. Cotton pyjamas are light and absorbent.
- Back-opening slippers, slides or non-slip socks to wear walking to the bathroom or toilet.
- Dressing gown or cardigan to keep warm and to wear over a hospital gown.
- Additional underwear.
- Your breast care nurse will let you know whether or not you need to wear a post-surgical bra. If so, take some with you to the hospital. It's recommended that you get these a size bigger than your normal bra size to allow for post-surgical swelling. Your breast care nurse will guide you on sizing.
- Comfortable clothes to wear when you leave the hospital, such as a loose button-up shirt and loose pants like trackpants or light elastic waist pants.
- Toiletries aren't provided on the ward and so you will need to bring your own. Items such as wet wipes or dry shampoo are easy to use in the first few days post-surgery.

Medications

- Take a list of all medications and supplements that you take with you to the hospital. It's a good idea to ask at your pre-op appointment if the hospital ward will stock these medications otherwise you may have to bring your own supply with you.
- Certain medications such as blood thinners may need to be stopped for a few days before surgery. Check this with your surgeon or breast care nurse.

Other items to keep you comfortable

- A water bottle with a non-drip spout can help you stay hydrated without having to sit up to drink from a glass.
- Reading glasses or contact lenses with solution, if needed.
- Eye masks can be helpful if you're trying to rest during the day or need complete darkness to sleep. Earplugs can also help block out the sounds of a busy ward.
- Mobile phone and charger. Some people recommend getting a 2m phone charger as the charging sockets are often behind the bed and difficult to reach. These can be purchased from The Warehouse, petrol stations etc.
- An iPad with some movies or games to help pass the time. Just remember to bring headphones if you want to watch a movie
- A notepad and pen can be very helpful for writing down tips and advice from the nursing staff. It's also useful to jot down questions to ask the surgeons.
- Some lip balm and boiled sweets can help with a dry mouth.
- Easy-to-eat snacks can be great if you get hungry overnight or miss a meal due to your surgery.

Leaving hospital

Before you're discharged from hospital, ask for the contact details of your breast care nurse or the person that you need to contact if you have any questions or queries. You will also be given instructions on caring for your wound (and drains, if you have any), as well as what pain medications to take and when. You will also be given an appointment time for follow up and this is often about two weeks after your surgery date.

How can BCFNZ help?

- Our specialist breast nurses can be called anytime if you have any questions or you would just like to take the time to talk over your plan. If you would like a call in the week or so after surgery, we can do this. It's free to call on **0800 226 8773**.
- On our website, you will find lots of information about our support services such as physiotherapy, counselling and lymphoedema.
- BCFNZ can send out a heart-shaped pillow to support your arm after surgery and drain bags, which you can take to the hospital with you. The pillow tucks up under your arm to provide support for those delicate post-op areas.
- Connecting to others. We have a patient app called MyBC where you can tell your story and learn from the experiences of other people with breast cancer.