Breast Cancer Surgery Education Program
Purpose & Objectives

Purpose: To prepare patients and their families to care for themselves after breast cancer surgery.

Objectives:
1. To describe post operative care including dressing and drain care, and managing nausea and pain
2. To understand post operative activity including general activity and arm exercises
3. To identify opportunities to take care of your emotional well-being
4. To be aware of community resources available
Support At Home

- Arrange for a friend or family member to take you home from the hospital and stay with you for at least 24 hours after surgery

- If you live outside of Ottawa, make plans to stay in the city for the first 24 hours

- A nurse may visit you in your home after the surgery
Home Nursing Care

The nurse will:

- Help you manage your pain and nausea
- Check your dressing and drain, and remove them on Day 5
- Review general activities and arm exercises
- Answer any questions you may have about your post-operative care
- Provide emotional support
Dressing and Wound Care

From Surgery to Day 5:
- A large dressing will be left in place until Day 5
- If there is drainage, the dressing can be reinforced with gauze
- Do not get the dressing wet – take sponge baths or a shallow bath

Day 5 and on:
- Large dressing and any drain(s) removed by nurse
- Keep dressing dry and clean – change small gauze over incision if needed
- Some drainage may occur for 5-10 days
- You may shower or bath, using mild soaps and clear water to wash gently over the incision
- Do not use any other cleansers or ointments on the incision(s)
- Have someone nearby in case you feel a bit weak
Drain Care

The doctor may use one of two types of drains – a hemovac or a Jackson-Pratt – and both remove fluid that would collect at the incision(s).

Figure 1: Hemovac Drain

Figure 2: Jackson-Pratt Drain
Drain Care

- The drain is connected to a fluid drainage set (a tube attached to a small container to hold the drained fluid)
- Bring your small flannel pouch to hold the drainage set with you on the day of your surgery (given to you at your surgeon’s office)
- Empty the drain twice a day or as needed
- If there is leakage around the drain, apply a gauze dressing
- Normally, over time, the drainage will change colour from clear red to clear pink and then clear yellow – normally there is no odour
- The drain will be removed on Day 5 by the Homecare Nurse
Emptying the Drain

- Wash your hands with soap and water
- Clean the drain closure with an alcohol swab before opening and closing
- Remove the plug and empty the fluid
- To re-establish suction, squeeze the drain on both sides until the drain appears to be flat
- While maintaining pressure, replace the plug. Slowly release your grip to re-establish suction. The drain should remain somewhat flat – not fully inflated.
- Wash your hands with soap and water
The Ottawa Hospital is currently conducting a study on the impact of different methods of pain control at the time of your surgery.

Your anesthesiologist will discuss this study with you at your Pre-Assessment Unit appointment.

The results of this study may help improve pain management for breast cancer surgery.
You will have received a prescription for pain medication from your surgeon

Fill these medications *before* your surgery

If you received a drug card at the pre-op appt, take it to your pharmacy

Take the medication as prescribed by your surgeon
Pain & Nausea Management

- Ensure you also have Gravol and Tylenol Extra Strength available.

- A nurse will visit you the evening of your surgery and the following day to help you manage any pain or nausea.
Sentinel Lymph Node vs. Standard Axillary Dissection

**Sentinel ("Guard") Lymph Node**
- Before surgery, a radioactive tracer is injected into the breast and it travels to and marks the key lymph node(s)
- The surgeon is then able to identify and remove just one or a few key lymph nodes

**Standard Axillary Dissection**
- During surgery, the surgeon removes a piece of tissue in the armpit area that has many lymph nodes
Common Issues:

- **Seroma Formation**
  - Collection of fluid under the skin after surgery – usually in armpit area
  - Can occur whether you have a drain in place or not
  - Can require drainage, if there is too much fluid for your body to reabsorb naturally
  - Tensor bandages can provide comfort
  - Common, treatable, does not indicate worse end results
Common Issues:

- Lymphedema
  - Accumulation of excess fluid caused by damage to lymphatic drainage system (from surgery) – swelling of the arm or hand, often accompanied by pain and discomfort
  - Can occur at various times after surgery and/or Radiation
  - Need to notify Nurse or Physician
  - To help prevent and manage:
    - Appropriate exercises
    - Proper skin care
    - Compression bandages
    - Physiotherapy
When to Call Your Doctor or Nurse

- Any sudden increase in pain or tenderness at the surgical site
- Temperature of 38 C or greater (100.4 F) for 24 hours
- Dramatic change in drainage colour accompanied by a foul odour
General Activity Guidelines

To Do:
- Use your affected arm as normally as possible within limits of pain
- Use your arm for light activities i.e. washing, hair, eating
- Pace yourself and balance activities with periods of rest
- Walk – if you have pain in your arm while walking, use pocket of a jacket to support your arm
- Maintain good posture
- Elevate and support your arm on several pillows when sitting or lying
- Avoid sudden movements until drain is removed & incision is healed

Avoid:
- Using the side of your surgery when getting out of bed
- Lifting greater than 1kg (2.5lbs) for 2 weeks after your surgery
- Lifting greater than 4kg (10lbs) for a further 4 weeks

Note: Most patients have full return of shoulder movement within 3 months of surgery
Exercise! It Will Help You...

- Regain full functional motion and strength in your arm
- Maintain and develop good posture
- Take proper care of your arm after surgery
- Prevent and manage swelling and lymphedema
- Remember: Start slowly, and increase amount daily.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1
(Surgery to Day 5)

- With or without a ball, squeeze your fist. Hold 5 seconds. Relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- Bend your elbow. Hold 5 seconds. Straighten and relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- Turn your head slowly from side to side to look over each shoulder.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- Bend your head slowly from side to side bringing your ear closer to your shoulder.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- Shrug your shoulders up and slowly release them.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- Squeeze your shoulder blades together and slowly release them.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- While lying flat, slowly raise your affected arm out to the side, keeping your elbow straight – go only as far as you feel a mild stretch.
Arm Exercises: Phase 1

- While lying flat, using your unaffected arm to assist, slowly raise your affected arm straight in front of you and over your head keeping your elbow straight until you feel a slight mild stretch.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2
(Day 5 Post-op to Return to Normal)

- **KEY: Wall Climbing**

  Stand facing a few inches from the wall, place your palms on the wall at shoulder level, and slowly slide your palms up the wall until a mild stretch is felt in your armpit. You may balance yourself by placing your unaffected arm on the wall. Hold and then relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2

- **KEY: Wall Climbing**
  Stand sideways an arm’s length from the wall and walk your affected arm up the wall until you feel some discomfort/stretch. Hold and then relax.
KEY: Chicken Winging
Lying on your back with your hands behind your head, bring your elbows forward and try to touch together in front of your nose. Stretch your elbows back down to touch the floor/bed. Bring your elbows forward as far as possible. Hold and then relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2

- **Cane Exercises:**
  While lying on your back with a cane or stick, raise it over your head and try to touch the surface behind your head. Flex your elbows and try to bring the cane down behind your head. Hold and then relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2

- Cane Exercises:
  While standing, hold the cane or stick behind your hips and slide the cane up your back. Hold and then relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2

- Chest Muscle Stretches:
  Standing in a doorway with your affected arm bent at 90 degrees, turn your body away – the stretch should be felt in the front of your chest. Hold and then relax.
Arm Exercises: Phase 2

- **Chest Muscle Stretches:**
  Standing in a corner with your feet 2-3 feet from the corner, raise both arms to 90 degrees and place your hands on the wall. Lean forward into the corner – the stretch should be felt in the front of your chest.
Resources & Support

1. **Ottawa Women’s Breast Health Centre**
   - Social work: emotional and practical support
   - Stepping Stones Group Program
     - emotional and information support, guest speakers

2. **Breast Cancer Action** 613-736-5921
   A survivor-directed community resource and support centre that provides:
   - Peer counseling
   - Extensive information about breast cancer and available community resources
   - Exercise classes
   - Lymphedema workshops: “Go with the Flow”
   - Guest speakers followed by discussion
3. **Canadian Cancer Society**
   - Peer Support Program 1-800-263-6750
     connect and matched to cancer survivor or caregiver
   - Cancer information specialist 1-888-939-3333
   - **Transportation help**: 613-723-1744
     Ask for Volunteer Drive Program to register

4. **Look Good Feel Better**
   Learn about facial skin care, makeovers, options for hair loss
   Monthly workshops at the Civic and General Campus
   - 737-7700*10315 must pre-register
More help

- **The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre**
  - The Ottawa Hospital Cancer Centre
    - Psychosocial Oncology Program 737-7700*70148
      - Social Work, Nutrition, Physiotherapy, Exercise, support groups
      - Ninon Bourque Library

- **Caring Voices**: [www.caringvoices.ca](http://www.caringvoices.ca)
  - Online community support for breast cancer, Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto

- **Willow Breast Cancer Support Canada**
  - Support and information breast cancer
  - 1-888-778-3100  [www.willow.org](http://www.willow.org)
Emotional Well-Being

- Finding a way to manage your diagnosis and treatment
- Managing Stress
  - Taking care of yourself
  - Dealing with others
    - Family
    - Friends
    - Health Team
- Role of the social worker
  - Emotional and Practical Support
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: 
Coping Tips

- Take care of yourself
- Take one day at a time
- Talk about your diagnosis. Find your comfort level.
- Become informed. Ask questions.
- Develop your support team
- Write down thoughts and feelings
- Use a calendar to record appointments and names
- Set small goals for yourself during treatment and recovery
- Ask for help when you need it
- Importance of exercise and lifestyle
- Use community resources for information and support

Remember, you are not alone!
Thank You!
Please feel free to ask questions!