

## **Prosthesis fitting service**

Before you have your mastectomy operation, the breast care nurse will talk to you about the change in your appearance. If you wish, she will discuss suitable bras and show you the different types of prostheses (breast forms) which are available.

### **What is a breast prosthesis?**

Prostheses are made from silicone and have skin-like covering. They are designed to look like a natural breast. Women are often surprised at the weight of a prosthesis, but this is essential to restore body balance and to achieve a good body shape.

The prosthesis is designed to wear against your skin. However, some women prefer to wear it in a pocket made in your bra.

Before you go home, you will be given a soft cotton prosthesis called a 'comfie' to place inside your bra. This soft prosthesis is very lightweight and whilst being comfortable to wear, it also provides you with additional protection to your scar.

If you find that wearing a bra is still uncomfortable at this early stage, you can pin your 'comfie' to a vest, camisole or petticoat. It will need to be pinned in your undergarment to prevent it from moving.

There are some self-adhesive prostheses that stick directly onto the skin. These are not usually recommended until at least nine months after surgery or radiotherapy. You are entitled to a free prosthesis provided you had your operation as an NHS patient.

Approximately six weeks after your surgery it will be possible for you to be fitted with your permanent prosthesis. Please phone the Mermaid Centre to make an appointment with the prosthetic clinic. All fittings are done by a trained fitter from one of the prosthetic companies. It is advisable to bring a well-fitting bra, with a full cup (no half cups).

A well fitting jumper or T-shirt will also allow you to see for yourself how well the breast form fits. You are welcome to bring your partner or a friend with you.

Women who have had surgery to remove some breast tissue or have had radiotherapy may find that the shape of the treated breast has changed. Sometimes the difference in size is only slight and a padded bra with the padding removed from the other side will solve the problem.

Occasionally a partial breast prosthesis may be more suitable to restore the natural contour of the breast. Partial prostheses come in a range of shapes and sizes and can be fitted into your normal bra.

The prosthesis is guaranteed for two or three years, however it is expected to last much longer than this. If you put on or lose weight, you may have another prosthesis.

If your prosthesis becomes worn or damaged, contact the Mermaid Centre to book a prosthetic appointment. Alternatively if you are happy with the fit, we can order a replacement for you to collect.

## **Bras and swimwear**

Your bra must be well fitting, so it is important to pay special attention to cup size. If you find that your breast is falling out at the side or at the front, the cup size is too small. If you notice wrinkling at the front of the cup, it is too big. Half-cup bras are unsuitable.

It is advisable to let the breast care nurse look at your bra when you attend your pre-op assessment as you may need to buy a new one before having the prosthesis fitted. Catalogues of bras and swimwear are also available from your breast care nurse.

## Handy hints

- All prostheses need to be washed daily in warm soapy water, rinsed and then patted dry.
- It is important to replace the prosthesis in its own box when not being worn to ensure that it stays in good condition.
- Please do keep the box and packaging. This is required for any exchange or returns.
- Do not use talc or moisturiser around the prosthesis, as this can damage it.
- Be careful with sharp objects that could puncture the prosthesis, like brooches, rings, knitting needles and pet's claws.
- If you notice a split in the prosthesis, do not worry. Apply a piece of sticky tape or a plaster over the area and contact the Mermaid Centre for a prosthetic appointment.
- Prostheses can be worn while swimming, but rinse them well in warm water afterwards. Swimming prostheses are available. Ask your breast care nurse for advice.

If you have any queries about bras or breast prostheses, please ask your breast care nurse.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690