

Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery

breast
cancer
care



This information is by Breast Cancer Care.

We are the only specialist UK-wide charity that supports people affected by breast cancer. We've been supporting them, their family and friends and campaigning on their behalf since 1973.

Today, we continue to offer reliable information and personal support, over the phone and online, from nurses and people who've been there. We also offer local support across the UK.

From the moment you notice something isn't right, through to treatment and beyond, we're here to help you feel more in control.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**





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Introduction

This booklet provides practical information about breast prostheses (artificial breast forms), bras and clothes for women who have had breast surgery.

Most of the information is aimed at people who've had surgery for breast cancer and have not had reconstruction (the creation of a new breast shape using surgery). However, it may also be useful for women whose breasts are naturally different from each other in size or shape, or who have had breast reconstruction that has not given an even match.

The booklet describes what type of bra to wear at different stages after breast surgery, and how to find bras for the long term that you feel confident in and that suit your lifestyle.

There is also information on different types of breast prostheses. For some women, wearing a prosthesis may be a temporary choice prior to reconstruction. Other women may choose not (or be unable) to have breast reconstruction and find wearing a prosthesis an effective and suitable long-term choice. Some women choose not to have a reconstruction or use a prosthesis. You can read more about this on page 31.

We've included practical tips on wearing a prosthesis with different styles of clothing and swimwear. These tips may also be useful if you don't wear a prosthesis.

For some women, surgery doesn't affect how they feel about themselves, but many others find it takes time to adapt to the changes. Our **Moving Forward resource pack** includes topics such as body image and relationships after treatment has finished. You may also find it useful to read our booklet **Your body, intimacy and sex**, which includes a section on changes to your body after cancer treatment.

We hope this booklet will address many of your information needs and concerns. If you have further questions or want more information, call our free Helpline on **0808 800 6000**. You can also find out more about getting further support on page 32.

Choosing not to have breast reconstruction

Many women decide not to have breast reconstruction. This can be for a number of different reasons.

Some women feel less concerned about the changes to their body than others and may feel that reconstruction is not the right choice for them.

Some women don't want to go through the extra surgery and recovery that breast reconstruction involves. Often more than one surgical procedure is necessary to get the required breast or nipple size and shape. There is also a risk the reconstruction could fail.

A reconstructed breast will not feel like a natural breast. Some women feel that nothing will replace their natural breast.

There may be other medical reasons why surgery is not possible.

Some women want time to adjust to their new body shape before deciding whether to have reconstruction or not.

Any decision you make about having breast reconstruction or not should be based on whether it's right for you. If you would like more information on breast reconstruction, see our booklet **Breast reconstruction**.

'I won't have reconstruction. This way, if I choose to have boobs then I can and if I feel like I don't want to bother then I don't have to. It's given me my control back.'

Sue

'I think on balance [not having reconstruction] was the best choice for me... I do feel I have lost some femininity and would much rather have two natural breasts. But I feel I look good and have the confidence to do what I want in life – indeed I probably have a better shape than before the surgery!'

Sandra

'I'm very comfortable with [my decision]; I have always taken the view that the less interference with my body the better.'

Ann

'You have to be happy with you and your body. You're the one who has to look at it in the mirror, not your surgeon, not your friends and you can't do it to please other people. It has to be your decision.'

Zoe

What to wear in the first weeks after surgery

Breast surgery, and sometimes radiotherapy, can make your chest area feel particularly sensitive.

Your surgeon or breast care nurse will advise you on what bra to wear depending on the type of surgery you've had. You don't need to wear a specific post-surgery bra (or 'surgical bra') unless you are advised to.

In the first few weeks after surgery, most women wear a soft bra that isn't too restrictive. You may find a front-fastening bra easier to put on as your shoulder may be stiff at first (see 'Bras' on page 10). Our leaflet **Exercises after breast cancer surgery** has exercises to help ease stiffness.

Your breast care nurse or one of the ward nurses will usually give you a fabric-covered temporary prosthesis known as a 'softie' or 'comfie' to wear during this time. You may find that the softie rides up because it's so light. It may look better and feel more secure if you adjust the stuffing and either stitch it to the bottom of your bra cup or keep it in place with a safety pin.

Once your scar area is fully healed and any swelling has gone down (usually within six to eight weeks) you can be fitted for a permanent silicone prosthesis if you choose (see page 15).

For more information on going without a prosthesis see page 31.

Bras

For up to a year after surgery the type of bra you need may change. During this time you may find your shape and size alters due to weight and treatment-related changes.

While the area recovers from surgery, the nerves repair and any skin changes from radiotherapy settle down, it's best to have a bra that has:

- soft seams
- a wide underband (the band that goes under the cups and round your back)
- deep front and side panels
- full cups
- cup separation (the centre of the bra between the cups should sit flat on your chest)
- fully adjustable straps
- minimal detailing
- no underwires (the wires sewn in under each cup)

It's best to avoid wearing an underwired bra while the area is recovering from surgery because the underwires can be uncomfortable.

Initially after breast surgery you may have swelling. Try to find a bra that fits on the loosest hook so it can be worn looser to begin with and then gradually tightened as the swelling goes down.

Where possible, choose bras that have a high cotton content. These will be gentler on your skin while it heals and will help you stay cooler if you're experiencing hot flushes.

Bra strap cushions can make the straps more comfortable on your shoulder and help the bra stay in place. You can buy these from lingerie shops or online.

Once the skin in the chest area has healed and settled down, which may take up to a year, you can wear less restrictive bras. However, if you're planning to wear a prosthesis they still need to be well-fitting and have a full cup.

Your guide to a well-fitting bra is a leaflet for any woman who wants to know how a bra should fit. It includes illustrations and practical tips on how to make sure your bra fits comfortably and gives proper support.

'I now use shaped bras with no wiring, with cups and no back fastenings, a bit like an overhead sports bra. This helps because there is no friction on my back where I have a scar from reconstruction, and also both breasts are not the same size and cups seem to even the shape out!'

Madeleine

'I have a couple of very pretty lacy bras that fit well and that I feel feminine wearing. All the bras [the fitter] had were plain and functional – and just didn't make me feel good. Having a bra I like, that gives me a good shape and that I feel comfortable and confident wearing is essential for me.'

Sandra

Getting your bra

Most specialist lingerie shops, and some high-street shops or department stores, have experienced bra fitters who will use a tape measure to give you your exact bra size. As your shape and size may change during and after treatment, it's a good idea to have your bra size accurately measured before you buy any new bras.

An experienced bra fitter will often have specialist training and experience in helping women who have had or are going to have breast surgery. It might be useful to call ahead and make an appointment to ensure you can be seen by a trained fitter.

You can buy mastectomy bras, from specialist suppliers, that are specifically designed for women who have had their breast(s) removed. Mastectomy bras are also available from many high-street shops, which can often be a cheaper option. However, any bra is suitable providing it follows the points mentioned on page 10.

‘I was originally referred by the breast care nurse to a lingerie shop where the owner was a specialist fitter. She helped me with the correct size and style best for me. She was excellent.’

Karen

‘It is worth shopping around until you find a suitable bra and I have often found the cheaper ones from chain stores are better.’

Madeleine

Bra pockets

If you choose to wear a prosthesis, a well-fitting bra with a full cup is often all that’s needed to hold your prosthesis in place. Many women find this creates a more natural appearance and is secure enough. However, some women prefer to have a bra with a pocket designed to help the prosthesis sit more securely in their bra.

Mastectomy bras come with an optional bra pocket. If you prefer, you can adapt an ordinary bra by sewing in a piece of stretchy material loosely across the back of the bra cup to act as a pocket.

You can also buy pockets to sew in yourself. These are available to buy online from most mastectomy bra stockists (see page 33). Use loose stitches when attaching the pocket as if a pocket is sewn in too tightly it can affect the bra’s shape.

Another alternative is to sew in two strips of evenly spaced ribbon, from the top to the bottom of the cup.

For a small fee, some specialist or high-street shops may be able to sew a pocket in for you. Some NHS hospitals will put a pocket into two or three bras free of charge. Ask your breast care nurse if this is available at your hospital.

Financial assistance

Mastectomy bras are exempt from VAT (value added tax) if they're bought by someone who's had breast surgery. The order forms on most websites and catalogues will have a box you can tick so that you don't have to pay VAT. If you're buying a mastectomy bra from a shop, check with a member of staff before paying for your bra. Many shops may ask you to sign a VAT exemption form stating that you have had breast surgery. You shouldn't need to provide a doctor's letter or other medical proof.

Macmillan Cancer Support provides grants that can be used to purchase surgical and mastectomy bras and swimwear. Contact them to find out if you are eligible for a grant by calling their Helpline 0808 800 8000 or via their website macmillan.org.uk

If you have been advised to wear a surgical bra and you or your partner are claiming certain benefits, you don't have to pay for it. The qualifying benefits are outlined in the Department of Health leaflet HC11, which you can get from the hospital, your nearest Jobcentre Plus or the NHS Business Service Authority website nhsbsa.nhs.uk

If you are not receiving a qualifying benefit but are on a low income you may still be eligible for a free surgical bra or help towards the cost of one under the NHS Low Income Scheme. To find out if the NHS Low Income Scheme can help and how to apply, visit their website nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts or call their helpline on 0300 330 1343.

Recycling bras

If you have any unwanted good quality bras there are various ways they can be donated and recycled. You can find details of some organisations that recycle bras at breastcancercare.org.uk/suppliers-bras-clothes



Breast prostheses

What is a breast prosthesis?

A breast prosthesis is an artificial breast form that replaces the shape of all or part of the breast that has been removed. It fits in a bra cup with or without a bra pocket (see page 12). 'Prostheses' is the word for more than one prosthesis.

Most breast prostheses are made from soft silicone gel encased in a thin film. They're moulded to resemble the natural shape of a woman's breast, or part of a breast. The outer surface feels soft and smooth, and may include a nipple outline.

'I have no issues wearing my prosthesis, it is a good match for my other breast (size wise), it is not heavy and fits into my bras discreetly. For me I wanted to look normal in my clothes and I feel that I do.'

Karen

Prosthesis styles

Prostheses come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and skin tones. They're made from materials that are designed to move, feel and weigh as similar to a natural breast as possible. It's important that your prosthesis suits your lifestyle as much as possible. You may want to consider the different clothing styles you want to wear your prosthesis with (see page 27).

Not all prostheses will be available on the NHS. You can find details of some suppliers at the back of this booklet or on our website at breastcancercare.org.uk/suppliers-bras-clothes

Sometimes people choose to wear their temporary prosthesis ('softie') instead of a permanent prosthesis.

'I mainly still wear the 'softie' I was given just after surgery. I am quite small and this fits well, does not move around, eg when I run, and gives me a shape I like.'

Sandra

Full or standard prosthesis

A full prosthesis has various backings designed to go straight against the chest wall where all breast tissue has been removed. It's matched in size, shape and skin tone to your other breast. If you've had both breasts removed you can select the size you feel most comfortable with.

Partial or shaped prosthesis

A partial prosthesis is for women who have had part of their breast removed. It's worn inside a bra and is shaped to fill out the breast outline. It's made of the same silicone material as most full prostheses.

Shell prosthesis

This is a type of partial prosthesis that may be used if your breasts are different in size from each other. It's a soft 'shell' of silicone that fits over your smaller breast so that it matches the larger one. This type of prosthesis can also be useful for women who have had breast reconstruction surgery where symmetry has not been achieved, or if an implant is in the process of being expanded.

'If I wear an ordinary bra then I use a silicone infill, which is most comfortable for my smaller reconstructed breast.'

Madeleine

Stick-on prosthesis

A stick-on prosthesis (full or partial) sticks directly onto the skin. This can suit women who are active or who want to wear a less supportive bra, as not all of the weight is taken by the bra. They can also be worn with strapless dresses and tops if the clothing is supportive enough (see page 27).

Most women will be advised not to wear a stick-on prosthesis for 12 months after surgery or during (and sometimes after) radiotherapy as it may damage the skin. Most have a sticky surface as part of the prosthesis itself. They can be worn either by attaching it directly to the chest wall or as a regular prosthesis with a protective backing over the stick-on part.

Prosthesis shapes

Symmetrical

A symmetrical form is usually an oval or triangular shape that can be worn on either the left or right side.

Teardrop

The teardrop shape is often more suitable for women whose breasts are fuller in the lower and outer area and less full above the nipple. These can also be worn on either the right or left side.

Asymmetrical

These are generally more suitable for women who have had more extensive surgery as they have extensions to fit under the arm or upper chest wall. However, they can also be used by women who have not had extensive surgery. They are specifically designed for either the left or right side.

Made-to-measure

Made-to-measure prostheses are not currently available in the UK. It is expected that they will become available in the near future.

This technique uses a 3D scanner to produce a computerised 3D image of the chest area, which can then be used to create a customised prosthesis shape. It is made to give a good match to the chest wall, which stops the prostheses moving, and is matched to your skin tone.

Weight

Silicone prostheses come in different weights. The most suitable weight will depend on how heavy your other breast is, or if you have had both breasts removed you can choose the weight you feel most comfortable with.

A full-weight prosthesis may make you feel more balanced as it matches the weight of your other breast. However, if you need a large size, a lighter-weight version might be more comfortable.

If a breast prosthesis is too light it can move around or ride up so it's not level with the other breast. If this happens discuss it with the person who fitted your prosthesis as you may need to be reassessed, or get advice about wearing a different type of bra.

'I found [the first] one too heavy as it was meant to mimic the weight of a breast. I subsequently bought a lighter and cheaper one that was meant to be just for swimming. I wore it for years.'

Androulla

Materials

Most prostheses are made from silicone, which is a soft gel-like substance.

Foam prostheses are also available. A foam prosthesis is lighter and cooler. It may be more suitable if you're particularly active or you may find this style more comfortable in warmer weather. Alternatively, some prostheses are filled with polypropylene beads. These mould into the shape of the bra and, as air is able to circulate, they are also cooler.

'I also have a bean-a-boob that is light and breathable if I do want to wear one for sport.'

Caroline

Skin tones

Although it might be difficult to achieve an exact match, many prostheses are available in colours to suit your skin tone. Having a prosthesis that is as close to your skin tone as possible may help you feel more comfortable and confident. Some companies make prostheses to order or can add colour to existing products. These specially-made prostheses may take longer to supply. Some women make or buy a cover for their prosthesis that is an even closer match to their own skin (see below).

Talk to your breast care nurse or fitter about finding a prosthesis that works with your skin tone.

Backings and covers

The backing of most prostheses is made of the same material as the front. Some may have a different backing, such as fabric or a soft panel of gel, designed to make them more comfortable. Backings that can be moulded to fit an uneven chest wall are also available. Some prostheses have backings that allow more air flow and may be cooler.

You can use a soft fabric cover to cover the silicone surface. While the prosthesis might not sit as well, this can help prevent a rash or skin reaction developing, which might happen if you get hot and sweat behind your prosthesis. You could also use a bra pocket to prevent this (see page 12). If you get a skin rash under the prosthesis, you should talk to your breast care nurse or GP.

Swim prosthesis

Swim prostheses are made especially for use when swimming, as they don't get damaged by salt water or chlorine. Some swim prostheses are transparent (clear).

In Wales, swim prostheses are available on the NHS. However, this does not apply in the rest of the UK.

Prosthetic nipples

Prosthetic (or 'artificial') nipples are made of soft silicone that can be worn on a reconstructed breast or prosthesis. They are either self-sticking or come with special skin glue that can hold the prosthetic nipple in place for several days.

Prosthetic nipples come in different sizes and skin colours but some hospitals custom-make them so they match the nipple on your other breast.

Alternatively, you might find it easier to use a nipple shield (or 'cover') on the other nipple so it looks less obvious. You can buy these from specialist suppliers and some high-street shops.

Getting your prosthesis

Your breast care nurse will usually arrange a fitting appointment for you if you want to have a permanent prosthesis. If you're not given an appointment, ask your breast care nurse.

Your appointment will often be at your local hospital. The breast care nurse may do the fitting herself or it may be done by another trained fitter, such as a surgical appliance officer or a representative from a prosthesis company.

Some women find it helpful to look at the selection of prostheses before their appointment, or even before their operation if possible, so that they have an idea of what to expect. You can discuss this with your breast care nurse.

You'll usually be given the prosthesis at your fitting appointment or very soon afterwards. However, if you choose a style that is not in stock, you may have to wait longer.

Although it's not advisable to buy a prosthesis without trying it first, they are also available from specialist suppliers (see page 33).

Will I have to pay for my prosthesis?

NHS patients do not have to pay for their prosthesis. However, not all prostheses styles are available on the NHS.

If you are a private patient, check to see if your private health scheme covers the cost of your prosthesis. If you have to pay for your prosthesis you won't have to pay the VAT on it and the fitter will ask you to sign a VAT exemption form stating that you have had breast surgery. Alternatively you may be able to have a prosthesis from the NHS in the same way that NHS patients can apply for a replacement (see page 24).

The prosthesis fitting

What to take with you

It is important to take a well-fitting bra (see page 10) to your appointment so the fitter can see how the prosthesis will sit in your bra.

It's useful to wear a plain, light-coloured top. This makes it easier to choose a prosthesis that gives you a good shape. You might want to wear a top that you can put on and take off quickly and easily.

Talk to the fitter about the styles of clothing you might want to wear your prosthesis with and if you're hoping to wear it for anything active. It might be useful to read the 'Clothing and swimwear' section on page 27 before your appointment. You could also take a variety of tops with different necklines so you can see how it might work with different styles.

At the fitting

The fitter will explain what will happen during the fitting and check you have a well-fitting bra.

At your appointment you should be given:

- a selection of sizes and styles of prostheses
- sufficient privacy
- a large mirror and good light so you can see for yourself what the prosthesis looks like in your bra and with clothing over it
- enough time for you to make the right choice

Your prosthesis should feel comfortable, give you a good shape and be a reasonable match to your skin colour.

'I took a good friend with me who I knew would be honest. And the breast care assistant was very good. [We chose one that] looks and feels natural and is easy to wear. I have been assured many times that people can't tell I have a fake boob.'

Caroline

Looking after your prosthesis

The prosthesis fitter will give you information on how to care for your particular type of prosthesis. If you follow the advice on looking after your prosthesis it should last several years. Generally, you should look after a silicone breast prosthesis as you would your own skin. Wash it daily in warm soapy water and dry it with a towel. If you have a stick-on prosthesis there may be specific products that you need to use to keep the prosthesis clean. Your prosthesis supplier will be able to tell you more about these.

When you aren't using your prosthesis, store it in the shaped unit inside the box it came in.

Take care not to catch the prosthesis with sharp objects such as rings or brooches as these may damage it, causing the silicone to leak. If it does get damaged, you can usually seal the tear temporarily with a sticking plaster.

Replacing your prosthesis

Your prosthesis will have a guarantee but the length of this can vary and most prostheses will last longer than the period of the guarantee. A replacement prosthesis is available on the NHS when it is worn out. You can also ask for a reassessment if your prosthesis is no longer a good fit, even if it's still in good condition. This might happen if your weight or body shape changes or if your lifestyle changes (for example, if you become more active).

The process for getting a replacement prosthesis will depend on what happens in your local area and whether you have been discharged from the breast clinic or not. You can contact your breast clinic to arrange a prosthesis reassessment and fitting, or if you no longer attend follow-up appointments ask your GP (local doctor) for a referral to the breast clinic or prosthesis fitter.

New prosthesis styles are being developed all the time, so when you need a replacement it's a good idea to have a reassessment rather than directly replacing the one you already have.

If your prosthesis is damaged due to a manufacturing fault, you should be reassessed and given a free new one if you're an NHS patient. If it's damaged because you have punctured it or not followed the care instructions, you may be charged for replacing it.

If you had your surgery privately, ask your insurance company if they cover the cost of future replacement prostheses. If they don't, you can ask your GP to refer you to an NHS breast clinic or prosthesis fitter to be fitted with a free replacement.

Donating your used prostheses

You may wish to donate your used prostheses, so they can be sent to countries where it is difficult or impossible to get a breast prosthesis. For example, the charity Hospices of Hope (hospicesofhope.co.uk) sends breast prostheses to Eastern Europe. See our website for details (breastcancercare.org.uk/suppliers-bras-clothes).

Air travel with a prosthesis

If you're going on a flight and choose to pack your prosthesis in your luggage, it's not unusual for some small air bubbles to appear in the back of your prosthesis. This is because the luggage hold is not pressurised. It will only happen if your prosthesis has a clear back. These small bubbles will disappear shortly after you have landed and will cause no harm to your prosthesis. If you have a lightweight prosthesis, the bubbles will appear as black dots. Again, these cause no harm and will disappear soon after you land.

Airport security body scanning

Body scanners are now in place at most airports. People are randomly picked for a body scan or may be scanned if the metal detectors are activated. External breast prostheses will show up on body scanners.

You may be worried about what this means for your privacy and feel anxious at the idea of someone noticing your prosthesis. If selected for a scan you might want to tell the security staff that you are wearing a breast prosthesis before being scanned. It may also be helpful for you to carry a letter from your GP or specialist team, confirming your situation.

What to expect if you're scanned

The scan will take place in a security area with a member of airport staff present. It only takes a few seconds.

The images are viewed remotely and cannot be seen by the public. You can ask for a female screener (the security officer analysing the images). The screener won't see you or be able to recognise you. The images don't show facial features, hair or skin tone, and are deleted immediately after analysis.

If you'd like more information, read the government's Code of Practice for the Acceptable Use of Security Scanners in an Aviation Security Environment on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.



Clothing and swimwear

It's not unusual to wonder what your appearance will be like after surgery or if your clothes will still look the same. With time, most women find that they can regain their confidence by knowing what works for them and what makes them feel more comfortable.

'For the first few years after the mastectomy I tried to buy clothes to feel extra feminine as I felt less so with one breast. That feeling has gone now.'

Androulla

The following suggestions will be of particular use to women who wear a prosthesis. However, they may also give ideas to women whose breasts differ from one another in shape or size and for women who don't wear a prosthesis.

Clothes

Strapless clothes and narrow straps

Some strapless clothes and clothes with narrow straps are made of material that provides good support, or have an extra support panel in the bra area. This may be enough to hold your prosthesis in place so it looks and feels comfortable.

If there's not enough support you could try:

- using a safety pin to attach a softie directly inside the garment
- wearing a strapless bra with your usual prosthesis (providing your usual prosthesis is not too heavy for a strapless bra) or with a stick-on prosthesis
- wearing a bra with transparent or decorative straps

Low necklines

If you want to wear a low neckline but still cover part of your chest area you can try:

- a camisole or vest top underneath a V-necked top so that it is visible across the 'V'
- a camisole-style bra, available from some specialist suppliers, made with lace inserted between the cups that will cover the cleavage area
- a lightweight lacy or semi-transparent top worn over a low-necked item, to disguise the cleavage area while still allowing the clothing beneath to show through
- using lingerie tape to attach clothing securely to the skin
- a draped scarf

'I have never really been self-conscious but am aware that necklines have to be high up and armholes tight! Necklines – even ones that aren't low – do become a problem when you bend down.'

Androulla

'High-cut tops, layers, or wearing a vest top underneath low-cut or baggy tops, limits the worry if you're bending down.'

Zoe

Low or revealing backs

You can buy bra strap extensions from specialist suppliers and some department stores (see page 33). Instead of fastening at your back, these continue round your body and fasten lower down at the front to enable you to wear clothes with low backs.

You can also buy bras with straps that can be crossed at the back, designed to not show when wearing tops with cut-away shoulders.

You may want to try going without a bra (see opposite).

Going without a bra

If you prefer to not wear a bra at all, there are ways you can adjust your clothes to wear them with a prosthesis if you want to. Try them on first and see what works for you. Some women:

- pin a softie into other underwear such as a vest top or camisole
- use a stick-on prosthesis with clothing that has good in-built support
- wear pocketed clothing, available online and from some specialist shops (these clothes are usually designed to be worn with a silicone prosthesis)

Sleepwear

If you want to wear a prosthesis in bed, you could consider:

- a 'sleep bra' or very soft, low-support bra with a softie
- pocketed nightwear, available online and from some specialist suppliers
- a camisole or nightdress with a softie pinned in place
- a stick-on prosthesis; this usually needs to be worn with some support, but you may find it stays in place on its own

Swimwear

High-street swimwear

If you want to wear a prosthesis when swimming, you can often find suitable swimwear in high-street shops, including one-piece and two-piece costumes. The top needs to be cut high enough over the breast area and under the arms to cover the prosthesis. It also needs to have some structure, which is usually provided by cups. If you choose to wear a bikini top, choose one that comes in bra cup sizes, with a full cup and a supportive underband.

You could adapt a high-street swimsuit that has cups by making your own pocket to hold a prosthesis in place (see 'Bra pockets' on page 12). If you do this you'll probably need to wear a lightweight prosthesis or foam leisure prosthesis as other prostheses may be too heavy.

Although you can swim in a silicone or foam leisure prosthesis it's important to rinse it well afterwards to avoid any possible damage from the chlorine or salt water.

You can also wear a swim prosthesis that doesn't get damaged by salt water or chlorine (see page 19).

Mastectomy swimwear

You may prefer to wear pocketed mastectomy swimwear. This type of swimwear can be bought in some high-street shops, large department stores or from specialist suppliers. They come in one-piece costumes, two-piece bikinis and tankinis. You can use your regular silicone prosthesis or a swim prosthesis in a mastectomy swimsuit.

You don't need to pay VAT on mastectomy swimwear if you have had breast cancer surgery (see page 13).

Made-to-measure swimwear is available from some companies. This allows you to choose the print and design for a swimsuit, tankini or bikini.

'At first I had concerns about when swimming – as I was lopsided in my swimsuit I thought people might look at me... No one looked or took any notice so I was fine. I did buy special mastectomy swimsuits because they are cut high under the arms and at the front with no gape when bending down.'

Karen

'I wear a black swimsuit with a bright pattern all down the other side that takes the eye away from the side I had the surgery. I do not use a swim prosthesis – I tried one but was too worried it would move or slip out when I was in the pool.'

Sandra

Going without a prosthesis

You may choose not to wear a prosthesis at all. Many women prefer how this looks and feels.

If you have had one of your breasts removed, you can make the two sides of your body seem more balanced by wearing dark, patterned fabrics and loose-fitting clothes. If you want to distract the eye further, you could wear overshirts, jackets, scarves or jewellery.

If you want to disguise a small difference between your breasts without using a prosthesis, a well-fitted padded bra can provide a good shape.

If you have had both of your breasts removed your chest area will be symmetrical. Many women prefer how this looks and feels but you could also try some of the ideas above.

Flat Friends is a charity that supports women who choose not to wear a prosthesis or have a breast reconstruction. See their website for more information (flatfriends.org.uk).

'I did wear more scarves in the early days to take the eye away from my breast. But as I have got more confident I have gone back to wearing what I did before.'

Sandra

'I joined the Flat Friends forum group – very helpful [in showing me the] value of pleats, asymmetrical drape, highly patterned designs, strategic pockets, chunky distracting jewellery etc. Over time I find myself buying more and more clothes/jewellery with these features and consequently wearing my prosthesis less.'

Ann

Further support

Everyone has different feelings about their body and how they look after breast surgery and there is no wrong or right way to feel. It's natural to have concerns. You may wonder how friends and family will react, or what people might say when you return to your everyday activities.

By taking simple measures you can become more confident about your body and how you look, which may affect other areas of your life in a positive way. This might include having a suitable prosthesis fitted, choosing an attractive, well-fitting bra, or making some adjustments to your clothes.

Some areas have support groups where you can talk to other women and find out what has worked for them. Your breast care nurse will also be able to tell you about local support.

What's important is that you can make your own choices and find what's most comfortable and works best for you.

Breast Cancer Care

Breast Cancer Care's Moving Forward courses and information are here for anyone who has had a diagnosis of primary breast cancer, helping you approach life after treatment with more confidence.

Our Someone Like Me service puts you in contact by phone or email with someone else who's had breast cancer and who's been trained to help.

You can also chat to other people going through breast cancer on our online discussion Forum at forum.breastcancercare.org.uk

Useful organisations

Below are some suppliers of bras, prostheses, clothes and swimwear. Most are specifically for women who have had breast surgery.

Mastectomy bras are available from specialist suppliers or many high-street shops, which can often be a cheaper option.

A fuller list of organisations that other women have found useful is available on our website at breastcancercare.org.uk/suppliers-bras-clothes. If you do not have access to our website you can request a copy by contacting our Helpline **0808 800 6000**.

Please note that this is not a complete list and Breast Cancer Care can't guarantee the quality of the services or products provided by these companies. Your hospital may also sell specialist bras and swimsuits.

All about – Silima

Telephone: 01295 220 524

Website: silima.co.uk

Products: Mastectomy bras, breast forms, prostheses and accessories.

Availability: online shop and catalogue order.

Amoena (UK) Ltd

Telephone: 0845 434 7334 (order line)

Website: amoena.com/uk

Products: specialist bras, swimwear, sportswear and prostheses.

Availability: online shop and catalogue order.

Fitting service/shop in Eastleigh, Hampshire, by appointment.

Asda (George at Asda)

Website: direct.asda.com/george

Products: post-surgery and non-wire bras.

Availability: stores nationwide.

Eloise

Telephone: 01908 340 094

Website: eloise.co.uk

Products: post-surgery bras, swimwear, prostheses and accessories.

Availability: online shop and catalogue order (with free returns).

Free fitting service at shops in South Wimbledon, London and Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, Milton Keynes.

Knitted Knockers

Website: knittedknockers.org

Products: provide free soft, lightweight knit prosthetics, made by volunteers. They also provide knitting patterns to make your own.

Nicola Jane

Telephone: enquiries/orders 0345 0845 265 7595

Website: nicolajane.com

Products: specialist pocketed bras, swimwear and vest tops, prostheses and bra accessories.

Availability: online shop and catalogue order, pocketing service.

Fitting service/shops in London, Leeds and Chichester, by appointment.

Trulife

Telephone: 0800 716 770

Website: ukire.trulifebreastcare.com

Products: mastectomy bras, leisure forms, prostheses and accessories.

Availability: catalogue order.

Womanzone

Telephone: 01925 220 932

Website: woman-zone.co.uk

Products: specialist, made-to-measure swimwear, plus some bras, prostheses and accessories.

Pocketing service available.

Availability: online shop, catalogue order and from their shop in Warrington.

Fitting service at Warrington shop, by appointment.





4 ways to get support

We hope this information was helpful, but if you have questions, want to talk to someone who knows what it's like or want to read more about breast cancer, here's how you can.



Speak to trained experts, nurses or someone who's had breast cancer and been in your shoes. Call free on **0808 800 6000** (Monday to Friday 9am–5pm, Wednesdays til 7pm and Saturday 9am–1pm).



Chat to other women who understand what you're going through in our friendly community, for support day and night. Look around, share, ask a question or support others at **forum.breastcancercare.org.uk**



Find trusted information you might need to understand your situation and take control of your diagnosis or order information booklets at **breastcancercare.org.uk**



See what support we have in your local area. We'll give you the chance to find out more about treatments and side effects as well as meet other people like you. Visit **breastcancercare.org.uk/in-your-area**

We're here for you: help us to be there for other people too

If you found this booklet helpful, please use this form to send us a donation. Our information resources and other services are only free because of support from people such as you.

We want to be there for every person facing the emotional and physical trauma of a breast cancer diagnosis. Donate today and together we can ensure that everyone affected by breast cancer has someone to turn to.

Donate by post

Please accept my donation of **£10/£20/my own choice of £**

I enclose a cheque/PO/CAF voucher made payable to
Breast Cancer Care

Donate online

You can give using a debit or credit card at
breastcancercare.org.uk/donate

My details

Name

Address

Postcode

Email address

We might occasionally want to send you more information about our services and activities

☐ Please tick if you're happy to receive email from us

☐ Please tick if you don't want to receive post from us

We won't pass on your details to any other organisation or third parties.

Please return this form to Breast Cancer Care, Freepost RRRKZ-ARZY-YCKG,
Chester House, 1-3 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DE



About this booklet

Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone **0345 092 0808**

Email **publications@breastcancercare.org.uk**



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For a large print, Braille, DAISY format or audio CD version:

Phone **0345 092 0808**

Email **publications@breastcancercare.org.uk**



When you have breast cancer, everything changes. At Breast Cancer Care, we understand the emotions, challenges and decisions you face every day, and we know that everyone's experience is different.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancercare.org.uk**

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