Breast Cancer Surgical Guide
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Thank you for allowing the Windsong Breast Care cancer team to help guide you as you travel the road from recovery to survivorship. This booklet is designed to answer some of your questions regarding what to expect prior, to, and after surgery. Inside you will find information on:

- What to expect when you meet the Breast Surgeon
- What to expect before surgery
- Pre-operative testing
- Pre-operative procedures
- Types of surgeries
- The day of surgery
- Post-operative care
- Post-operative activity
- When to call your doctor after surgery

You will also receive additional information regarding: drain care, post operative care instructions from your surgeon and plastic surgeon (if applicable) post operatively from the surgical facility.

What to Expect When You Meet the Breast Surgeon and Prior to Surgery

Once the diagnosis of breast cancer is made the Breast Patient Navigator will assist you in scheduling an appointment for your MRI, Genetic Counseling (if desired) and with your Breast Surgeon. This appointment will take place after the breast MRI which provides additional information to assist the surgeon in determining your best course of treatment. It is advised that you bring your insurance cards, medication list, family cancer history, your survivor care plan, and a calendar to assist you in making additional appointments.
During the visit you will receive a physical examination, review of medical and family history and medications. The imaging reports from the Radiologists will be reviewed, along with all relevant pathology reports. Once all the information is obtained and reviewed the breast surgeon will discuss with you the various treatment options for your individual diagnosis. This discussion will include the types of surgeries, evaluation of the lymph nodes, and the follow up care needed to decrease the likelihood of recurrence.

One tool your physicians may use to help determine the breast cancer recurrence rate and need for chemotherapy is Oncotype Dx. A sample of tissue is obtained during surgery and is measured for genetic activity. This activity provides a guideline to the likelihood of recurrence. Based on your individual type of cancer and medical history, your surgeon or Medical Oncologist may recommend this supplemental testing. The results of this test will be provided to the medical oncologist.

Many patients bring a significant other with them to assist in evaluating the treatment options that best suit your needs and to provide additional support.

At the conclusion of the first visit the preparations for scheduling your surgery will begin. In addition, you may be provided information or scheduled for additional appointments. Not all patients will need all of these appointments and some may not require any of these appointments prior to your surgery. Your breast surgeon will advise you on which evaluations are appropriate for you:

1. **Plastic Surgeon**- if you and your doctor determined that plastic surgery may be an option an appointment will be made for you to meet with the plastic surgeon that works with your breast surgeon. During the preoperative visit the various options for reconstructive surgery and potential outcomes will be provided to you.

2. **Medical Oncologist**- some patients will be referred to our medical oncologists for a pre surgical consult. Some patients may benefit from pre-surgical chemo therapy. At that time an initial clinical evaluation is completed with potential treatment options available. Final determinations for treatment are made after surgery with the final pathology and staging of the cancer.

3. **Radiation Oncologist** - some patients will be referred to our radiation oncologist for a pre surgical consult. At that time an initial clinical evaluation is completed with the possible treatment options available. Final determinations for treatment are made after surgery with the final pathology and staging of the cancer.

4. **Genetic Counseling and/or testing**- Based on your individual medical and family history, you may be a candidate for genetic testing. A type of test called BRCA1/2 is specific to breast and ovarian cancer and can provide you with information to determine if you have a high risk for breast cancer or if you have an inherited cancer predisposition. In addition, you are able to meet with a specially trained genetic counselor to review your predisposition and test results.

5. **Nutrition Counseling**- some patients request to meet with a registered Dietician to discuss current nutrition and obtain a dietary plan to support them through surgery and treatment for their breast cancer. Based on your interests and needs the surgeon can refer you to our Dietician.
Pre-operative testing:

1. Once you have met with your breast surgeon, you will be sent for tests in preparation for surgery. These might include: labs (blood draw), chest x-ray, EKG, and review of the consent.
2. After you completed your pre op testing, you will be required to meet with your primary doctor for medical clearance, which is an approval that you are okay to undergo the prescribed surgery. This visit will occur within two weeks prior to your surgical date.
3. You will receive a letter from the surgical scheduler to include day and time of surgery, instructions on pre operative testing and a post operative office visit.

Pre-operative procedures:

Needle localization- Depending on the type of surgery you will be having, you might have a thin wire inserted in your breast to help the surgeon locate the area to be removed at surgery. Your breast will be positioned for a mammogram, and then the radiologist will pass a wire into your breast until the wire attaches to the clip that was placed in your breast at the time of the biopsy. This is the area that will be removed during surgery. The area is checked to be sure it’s correct using a mammogram. The other end of the wire will be taped securely to your breast so that you can get dressed and to prevent position changes. This procedure may take place at Windsong Radiology or at the hospital a few hours prior to surgery. The wire will be removed during surgery.

![Image to confirm needle localization in proper place](image1)

![Image to confirm clip and tissue removed during surgery](image2)

TIP: Dress for comfort. It is easier to get dressed in between your injections and needle localization if you wear a loose-fitting top that opens in the front.
Sentinel lymph node injections- This procedure gives the surgeon a way to find the first lymph nodes draining your breast (the sentinel nodes.) It is the first lymph node that cancer is likely to spread to. These are the nodes that will be removed first during surgery. A few hours prior to your surgery, your breast will be injected with a small amount of radioactive liquid. This liquid will drain to the sentinel lymph node(s) and the sentinel nodes can be found during surgery using a special probe to locate the ones that have the highest radioactive counts. The amount of radioactive material used is very small and no special precautions need to be taken. You should experience no side effects from this material. The sentinel node that is removed during surgery will be viewed by the pathologist while you are still in the operating room. If cancer cells are found an axillary lymph node dissection will be performed where the additional lymph nodes in the armpit arm removed.

TIP: This is a very fast procedure and can be more comfortable if you will try to relax your muscles and breathe normally. It might help to talk to maintain normal breathing.
Types of breast surgeries:

You will have the chance to discuss types of surgery done for breast cancer with your surgeon. At that time, the surgeon will suggest which type is best for you and give you possible options.

1. **Lumpectomy** - also referred to as partial mastectomy.
   The lump of breast tissue containing cancer cells is removed and includes both the cancer and a buffer zone of breast tissue. This buffer is referred to as the margin.

2. **Simple or Total Mastectomy**
   This means removal of the entire breast and a portion of the skin.
3. **Modified Radical Mastectomy**
This refers to the removal of the entire breast, a portion of the skin, and all of the lymph nodes in the armpit (or axilla.)

4. **Mastectomy with Immediate Reconstruction**
A plastic surgeon will begin the process of reconstructing the breast during the same surgery.

5. **Mastectomy with Delayed Reconstruction**
A plastic surgeon will begin the process of reconstructing a new breast at a later time after your mastectomy surgery.

6. **Skin Sparing Mastectomy**
The entire breast is removed while saving a majority of the skin.
What to Expect the Day of Surgery (Available at 2 locations)

1. Your surgeon’s scheduler will give you times for any pre-operative procedures to be performed right before surgery. Theses procedures might include:

   a. The nuclear medicine injections done at the hospital or at Windsong Radiology. (see above description of what to expect.)
   b. The needle localization done at the hospital or at Windsong Radiology (see above discussion.)

2. You must have someone take you to these procedures and provide you a ride afterwards for your safety. Check in at the admissions office at the time listed on your preoperative letter.

3. Once you are through admissions and received any pre-operative procedures you will report to the ambulatory surgical area. There you will have an IV started, meet with your surgeon(s), the anesthesia team and some of the nurses who will be with you in the operating room. You will be asked to sign consents and might be given some medication through your IV to help you relax before going back to surgery. Once all the preoperative procedures are completed, your family may sit with you in the surgical holding area.

   TIP: The morning of surgery, dress for comfort. It is easier to get dressed for your trip home after surgery if you wear a loose-fitting top that opens in the front. If you are having a lumpectomy, you will be advised to wear a supportive bra with no underwire 24 hours a day for several days. This will keep the breast from moving and help keep you more comfortable. If you are having a mastectomy, there are garments that might assist you in managing your drains and during the recovery period. Please ask your surgeon or patient navigator or contact Au Naturel for information. Do not wear any makeup, deodorant, perfume or nail polish to the hospital on your surgery day. Remove all jewelry.

   TIP: You might want to pack a pillow for the trip home after surgery to pad any bumps you could encounter. Also, if you wear glasses to read, you will need them before surgery to sign consents. Bring your glasses case so that they can be stored during surgery along with your other clothing and personal items. A family member/friend can hold on to them for you if you prefer. If you wear removable dentures, these will also be removed and stored while you are in surgery.
What to Expect After Surgery

1. While you are in the Recovery Room, the surgeons will speak with family members (or whomever you designate) in the waiting room. You will be in the Recovery Room long enough to assure that you are awake, comfortable, and in stable condition. If you had a mastectomy you can plan on staying one night in the hospital otherwise you will be discharged once you are stable.

2. Your nurse will review discharge instructions with you and your family at the time of discharge. You will also receive prescriptions for pain or any other medications prescribed by your surgeons. You will follow up with the surgeon in the office one to two weeks after surgery.

3. You will receive general post-operative instructions and post-operative reconstruction care instructions at the hospital.

Post-Operative Activity

1. After surgery, it is important to begin using your arm to prevent stiffness at the arm and armpit. Do not lift, push, or pull anything, including a small child that weighs more than 10 pounds. Use the arm for normal daily activities such as combing your hair, brushing teeth, and simple food preparation. When resting keep the arm elevated on a pillow to allow air into the armpit area and to reduce swelling.

2. Avoid repetitive motions or exercises until you have seen your surgeon for further instructions.

3. Refer to the hospital discharge instructions regarding when you can safely drive.

4. You may shower after you receive the okay from your surgeon. Wash with a mild soap—i.e. Ivory (avoid perfumed soaps) and allow warm water to hit your back and flow gently over your shoulders. Pat dry and avoid rubbing the surgical area. Do not shave, wear deodorant, body wash, or perfume on the affected side until after you see your surgeon. Please refer to the discharge instructions for more information.

5. Discuss with your surgeon when you can return to work. This will vary with the type of surgery, your medications, your overall health, and the type of work you do.
When to Call Your Doctor

Leaving the hospital after surgery can be scary. It is normal to have some discomfort, bruising, itching, and swelling in the area of the surgery. You might also experience some shooting pains or numbness in your arm or hands. It is always better to be seen in the office if you have concerns to allow your doctor to see what is happening. However, you should be alert to a time when you need to call the surgeon following surgery to assure that you are healing normally. Call your surgeon to report the following:

- increasing/excessive swelling, redness and irritation, or drainage at the surgery site(s)
- a temperature of 101 degrees or higher
- pain that does not get better with pain medicine
- discharge or a bad odor from the incisions
- wound drainage becomes bright red
- leakage around the drain tubing
- reactions to medications that might indicate an allergic reaction (see drug inserts from your pharmacy)
- persistent constipation
- any other serious concerns

If you have a concern- simply call the breast surgeons office at (716)-626-6300. We are available after hours if you have a concern that cannot wait until the next day.

🌸 TIP: Do not take prescribed pain medications on an empty stomach. This could cause nausea. If you take more than one or two doses, take a stool softener along with your pain medication to avoid constipation. Getting out of bed and taking short walks can also help prevent this problem.
After Having All Lymph Nodes Under the Arm Removed

What is lymphedema?

The lymphatic system is a collection of tissues and organs that produce certain cells to fight infections. Lymph fluids circulate through your body to distribute these cells to other parts of the body. Along the way are pea-sized filter stations called lymph nodes. Lymph nodes are located throughout the body— in the armpits, the neck, the groin, etc. If these nodes are removed during surgery— or if you have radiation therapy to the nodes in the armpit— then the lymph fluid may not circulate well and can start to collect in the arm and hand. This causes swelling called lymphedema.

Lymphedema does not always happen. If it does occur, however, it is typically chronic and intermittent. You may need to be referred to a specially trained physical therapist to measure your arm, instruct you on wraps and exercises, and fit you with special compression garments (such as sleeves, gloves, and bras.) Removing some or all of the lymph nodes in the armpit does not necessarily mean you have a greater chance of getting the flu or other illnesses, but it is wise to take certain steps to reduce the chance of infection in the arm.

How can the risk of swelling or infection be reduced?

1. **Protect your skin:** Keep clean, dry and moisturized. Avoid injuries and protect with sunscreen and insect repellant. If scratches/punctures do occur, wash with soap and water, apply antibiotic cream and observe for signs of infection. (i.e. redness and warmth) If rash, itching, redness, pain, increased skin temperature, fever or flu-like symptoms occur, contact your physician immediately for early treatment of possible infection.

2. **During the recovery period:** Elevate your whole arm and hand on pillows as you lie down. Pump your hand by squeezing it several times a day. Using a soft stress ball can make this easier. Do not lift heavy objects, move heavy furniture, lift a child or walk a dog on a leash.

3. **Maintain an active lifestyle:** Exercise regularly with a combination of activities including strength, flexibility and endurance exercises. Gradually build up the duration and intensity of any exercise. The Hope Chest of Buffalo provides free exercise classes for patients at various locations in the area. Ask your surgeon or navigator for information or go online at hopechestbuffalo.org

4. **Avoid constriction of arm:** Ask your doctor if your arm can be used to check blood pressure, have injections or blood draws. Wear loose fitting clothing and jewelry.
TIP: Please ask your breast surgeon and plastic surgeon about any further specific instructions.

Post-Operative instructions: Breast Cancer Surgery Without Reconstruction

1. Lumpectomy and sentinel lymph node biopsy: You will usually go home after your surgery.
2. There is sometimes an overnight hospital stay after mastectomy and/or armpit lymph node removal.
3. Sometimes a drainage catheter is inserted in surgery to drain fluids:
   a. A home care nurse might be arranged to help with drain care at home; but this is often not necessary.
   b. You and your caregiver will receive hands-on teaching from the nurse after surgery at discharge.
   c. Do not let the drains hang by gravity. Pin them to your clothing, a belt, or other device. The last two options may be used if you are able to shower.
   d. Ensure you monitor the drainage in the tubing to ensure it is freely flowing away from the surgical site. Do not allow the drainage to flow back into the surgical site.
   e. If you prefer, you may use a post-operative garment to help you manage your drains. For more information about this, contact the Breast Patient Navigators or Au Naturel at 716-839-7144
4. The incisions will be closed with skin tape or glue and covered with gauze. Only the gauze is removed after you shower in two days. Sometimes, the only dressing is skin glue, and you can shower the evening of surgery.
5. If you had a lumpectomy, consider wearing a bra for 7 days, around the clock, in order to relieve tension from the incision. A wireless, supportive bra or a sports bra will work.
6. A collection of fluid can sometimes form at the site of an armpit lymph node biopsy; this is called a – lymphocele. This will look like a bulge which feels like a “golf ball” and can be drained in the office if it becomes uncomfortable.
7. After surgery, use the surgical arm for low stress activities to avoid stiffness. Avoid lifting anything that weighs more than 10 pounds and avoid repetitive movements.
8. You may use the ice pack you received during you breast biopsy for control of swelling and/or pain.
**Post-Operative Instructions: Breast Cancer Surgery With Reconstruction**

*Reconstruction with tissue expander placement*

1. There is an overnight hospital stay after expanders are placed at surgery.
2. A drainage catheter is used to drain fluids:
   a. A home care nurse might be arranged to help with drain care at home; but this is often not necessary.
   b. You and your caregiver will receive hands-on teaching from the nurse after surgery at discharge.
   c. Do not let the drains hang by gravity. Pin them to your clothing, a belt, or other device. The last two options may be used while you shower.
   d. If you prefer, you may use a post-operative garment to help you manage your drains. For more information about this, contact the Breast Patient Navigators or Au Naturel at 716-839-7144
4. If the incisions are oozing, you can cover the incisions with new gauze or maxi-pads. Remove the gauze once the oozing has stopped.
5. No lifting more than 5 pounds with the surgical arms for 3 weeks. Gentle range of motion is okay, but stops if pain or resistance is felt. It is okay to resume normal activities and unlimited range of motion at 6 weeks after surgery. The plastic surgeon will give you the okay to resume normal activities
6. If you have had radiation therapy, you cannot lift more than 5 pounds for 6 weeks.

*Reconstruction with a tram flap*

1. After this surgery, you will stay in the hospital for at least 2 or 3 nights.
2. The same dressing and drain care apply as above.
3. After a tram reconstruction, do not lift more than 5 pounds for 6 weeks.
4. Avoid placing warming pads, ice, or anything else to the flap, as it can injure the skin.
6. You may begin gentle range of motion with the surgical arm after one week- and then normal activities and unlimited range of motion after 6 weeks.

❗ **TIP:** Please ask your breast surgeon and plastic surgeon about any further specific instructions.
What to Expect at Your Post-Operative Visit:

Your post operative appointment with your breast surgeon will be planned prior to your surgery. It is typically one to two weeks after your surgical procedure. You will receive a full evaluation and review the results of the surgery and surgical pathology report. A physical exam will be completed with attention to the incision(s) and the arm on the surgical side. The discussion of the pathology results will include evaluation of the margins to ensure the area surrounding the tissue is free of cancer cells, evaluation of any lymph nodes that were removed, and the type of cancer including its characteristics. Based on all of this individualized information the remainder of your treatment plan will be developed. This may include radiation, chemotherapy or hormone therapy and a plan for follow up imaging with mammography or MRI.

You will be scheduled for your next follow up visit with the Surgeon or the Nurse Practitioner prior to leaving.

Contact Numbers

Windsong Radiology Group    (716) 631-2500
Windsong Breast Care
   Dr. Katherine O’Donnell    (716) 626-6300
   Dr. Michael Peyser
CCS Oncology
   Radiation Oncology        (716) 810-9631
   Medical Oncology          (716) 565-0355
Plastic Surgery             (716) 932-7789
Cancer Counseling Services (716) 565-2092
WNY Nutrition              (716) 474-9645
Orthosports Physical Therapy (Lymphedema Specialist) (716) 839-3705
Au Naturel-Breast Prosthetics Boutique (716) 839-7144
Acupuncture Works          (716) 983-9842
Genetic Counseling         (716) 626-6300
                            (716) 565-0355
Cancer Service Program
   Erie County               (716) 858-7376
   Niagara County           (716) 278-4898