



Queen Victoria Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) Breast Reconstruction

Information for patients



What is ERAS?

ERAS is a guideline for all the professionals caring for you (multi-disciplinary team). The aim of the ERAS guideline is to improve the experience and well-being of people who are undergoing major surgery. It helps you to recover sooner so life can return to normal as quickly as possible. The pathway focuses on making sure that you are actively involved in your recovery.

There are four main stages

- Planning and preparation before admission (including nutrition).
- Reducing the physical stress of the operation on your body.
- A structured approach to managing your care during and after your surgery, including pain relief.
- Early mobilisation (getting you moving as soon as possible).

We will give you some carbohydrate drinks to be taken in the hours before your surgery. Research has shown that these carbohydrate drinks reduce the stress of the surgery on your body.

There is an early mobilisation plan, the purpose of which is to get you moving as soon as possible and involves you getting out of bed the morning after your surgery. You will be encouraged to walk increasing distances on the ward every day until you are discharged home. You will also be encouraged to eat meals sitting out in the day room.

What to expect

Preparation before admission

The consultant surgeon and their team, including specialist nurses, will meet with you before you come into hospital. They will explain what they are planning and you will have plenty of opportunities to ask questions.

You will receive an appointment to attend either face to face, by telephone or virtually the Pre-assessment Clinic (PAC), before the date of your surgery to ensure you are fit for the anaesthetic and surgery.

You will be assessed by a nurse who will check your general health and carry out tests such as a blood test, blood pressure check etc. You will be assessed by an anaesthetist to discuss your anaesthetic requirements. They will also discuss pain relief and monitoring equipment you will have after the operation and give you the opportunity to ask any questions.

Patients are most often admitted on the day of surgery, usually around 07.15am in the morning.

Preventing blood clots after surgery

You will be given blood-thinning injections (Dalteparin) to give yourself the evening before surgery and for 14 days after leaving hospital. You will be taught how to give yourself these once-daily injections during your pre assessment appointment.

You will be given two pairs of anti-embolism stockings at discharge which you will be asked to wear for three weeks post-surgery. These measures will reduce the risk of you getting a blood clot in your legs (DVT) or lung (PE) after your surgery.

Reducing the physical stress of the operation

Early mobilisation

The sooner we can get you out of bed, eating, drinking and feeling comfortable, the better. Getting you moving (mobilising) as soon as possible is an important part of ERAS as it helps to reduce your risk of developing complications such as chest infections and blood clots. Mobilising will also get your gut and bowels working which will help prevent you from feeling sick. This in turn means you are able to eat and drink well, giving your body energy to recover.

Nutrition

You will be given six cartons of the carbohydrate drinks (pre-op Nutricia) by your pre-assessment nurse. These are special drinks designed for patients undergoing surgery. They are clear, still, lemon flavoured drinks that contain carbohydrates and minerals. They are easy to digest so you may drink these up to two hours before your surgery. Most people prefer to drink these drinks chilled or over ice. Once a carton is opened you should aim to drink it within four hours. The drinks are free from gluten, lactose and fibre.

Instructions for use:

Evening before your surgery:

drink 4 x 200ml cartons of the pre-op Nutricia drinks

Morning of your surgery:

drink 2 x 200ml cartons of the pre-op Nutricia drinks before 6.30am

When should you stop eating & drinking before the operation?

- You can have normal food and drinks until **6 hours before** your operation (stop at midnight).
- We encourage you to drink clear fluids only until **2 hours before surgery** (until 06:30am).

Clear fluids include; your pre op carbohydrate drinks. water, **black** tea or **black** coffee.

No milky drinks, chewing gum or mints are allowed.

What happens on the day of surgery?

You will be asked to report to the Main Theatres Reception (MTR) for 7.15am.

The theatre staff will check your admission paperwork and recheck your observations (blood pressure, pulse, respiration rate, oxygen saturation levels in your blood and your temperature). You will see the surgeon who will check your consent with you and 'mark' you for surgery. The anaesthetist will see you too.

You will be taken to lie on a bed/trolley with a 'space blanket' over you - this ensures you are kept warm whilst waiting for your operation. You may be asked to take a painkiller tablet before your operation between 7.30am and 8am with a small sip of water. The theatre staff will provide you with this.

What happens after the operation?

Immediately after surgery

After your operation you will wake up in the recovery area where you may have several monitoring drips, drains and tubes attached to you. All of these will have been explained to you before your surgery. Recovery nurses will take care of you and ensure you are comfortable. When ready, you will be moved to the Enhanced Recovery Area (ERA) which is a higher-dependency bay in Margaret Duncombe Ward, the main female surgical ward.

Evening of your surgery

You can drink fluids orally and if the surgeons are happy with your progress and you feel up to it you can have a snack too. ERA nurses will monitor you closely and will check your breast reconstruction every 30 minutes.

On the first day after your operation

A nurse will help you to have a wash, put on your support garments and your own nightwear. You will be given a bag to carry your drains in.

The nurses and/or physiotherapists will help get you out of bed. You will sit out for about two hours in total and will be encouraged to move around as much as you are able. The physiotherapist will teach you deep breathing exercises and bed/ chair exercises.

Your urinary catheter will be removed as soon as you are mobile. Other attachments (cannulas, drains etc.) will be removed when the surgeons and nurses feel it is appropriate.

You will be given regular medication for pain.

You will be able to eat and drink normally and encouraged to eat at least one meal sitting in your bedside chair.

On the second day after your operation

You are encouraged to shower independently and get dressed in your own clothes.

You should:

- be up for a minimum of four hours in total
- continue to eat and drink normally sitting at the table in the dayroom
- take three walks today – aiming for 2x the length of the ward each time

Many patients are now discharged home on the second day post-surgery. Some women may need a further night in hospital to recover. This is very individual and this will be discussed with you.

Leaving hospital

You will be discharged home when:

- staff have assessed you as being medically fit
- all your drains have been removed
- you are independently mobile
- you have opened your bowels
- your pain is controlled
- you are eating and drinking with no nausea or vomiting
- you are competent with Dalteparin injections, or have an alternative option in place

You will need to make your own arrangements for discharge including transport and support at home.

Although you will be discharged home with some pain relief, this is only enough for 1 or 2 weeks, so please make sure you have an adequate supply of paracetamol at home ready for discharge (these can be purchased from your local pharmacy or supermarket).

Follow-up after you are discharged

- You will be given an appointment to attend the Plastics Dressing Clinic (PDC), in the Main Outpatients Department, one week after you are discharged.
- A second follow up appointment with one of the surgical team will be sent to you approximately 6 weeks after surgery.
- The Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurse Specialists will contact you at home by telephone usually within the first two weeks after you are discharged but you can always contact them sooner if you have any questions or concerns.

At home

Daily activities and light exercise may be resumed as soon as you feel able (generally 4 to 8 weeks after your surgery). Use the activity examples in the '**Breast Reconstruction Post-Operative Handbook**' as a guide. This leaflet will be given to you on the ward before you are discharged.

Physical activity and nutritional food help to prevent tiredness. It is advisable to have a protein rich diet (e.g. meat, cheese, eggs) as this aids wound healing.

Regular pain relief will enable you to participate in daily activities/exercises.

If you require advice after your discharge from hospital, please use the contact numbers below:

Pre-Assessment Clinic 01342 414292

Margaret Duncombe Ward 01342 414450

Plastics Dressing Clinic 01342 414442

Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurse Specialists

01342 414302/414306

Please ask if you
would like this leaflet
in larger print or an
alternative format.

Breast Care Nurses

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