



Queen Victoria Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Going home with a redivac drain after surgery



This leaflet explains about going home with a redivac drain following your surgery. If you have any further questions, please speak to the nurse or doctor discharging you.

What is a drain?

A surgical drain is a thin plastic (PVC) tube that is placed in the space (cavity) created when tissue is removed during surgery. Its purpose is to remove the fluid from your body that collects after an operation. The tube is stitched into the space and the end of the tubing is outside your body attached to a plastic measuring bottle similar to the one shown in the photographs in this booklet.

Why do I need a drain?

Following surgery to the breast, underarm (axilla), abdomen, groin, leg, arm, back or neck wound drain(s) may be inserted. This helps to prevent a build-up of fluid (seroma) from forming and causing swelling and discomfort. The drain will also minimise any bruising to the area. Although we try to remove drains before you go home, there are some types of surgery where it may be necessary for you to go home with a drain which you will need to look after.

The drain(s) will normally stay in for approximately 7-14 days, but this may need to be longer depending on how much fluid is draining each day and the type of surgery you have had. We advise you to use a small bag to carry your drain/s in.

How does the drain work?

An active (vacuum) drain uses gentle suction. When the suction in the bottle is active, the green vacuum indicator on the top is in a downward (pressed) position.

The colour and volume of fluid can be observed through the bottle, and this is of importance to the surgeon. As the area heals the amount of fluid collected decreases until it is low enough for the drain to be removed.

What if I am a smoker?

The Hospital has a no smoking policy throughout its premises which means that smoking is not permitted in any buildings or on the grounds.

Smoking greatly increases the risks of complications with this surgery and delays your recovery and the healing of wounds. Stopping smoking can be very difficult. If you need more support in giving up, please make use of the smoking cessation clinics and support agencies in your area and consult your GP. If you would like a list of stopping smoking advice lines and support, please ask.

Measuring and changing the drain

During your hospital stay, the amount of fluid collected in your drain is measured and documented in your notes at the same time every day. A mark is drawn on the bottle to show the level of the fluid.

Your nurse will show you how to care for your drain and also how to record the measurements on a chart so that you can monitor the output at home. To make this easier for you, the bottle has a measuring scale printed on it. Once you are at home, you can measure the fluid level each morning at a time that is convenient for you.

It is important that the fluid level is measured at the same time each day. We suggest 8am each morning.

When you are discharged, you will be provided with a spare drainage bottle, an orange clinical waste bag, some gauze, dressings and tape. Your nurse will show you how to change the bottle (if necessary).

There are three reasons why your bottle may need changing at home:

1. If the bottle is full.
2. If the green vacuum indicator is completely expanded indicating no suction left.

No suction 'devacced'



Vacuum intact



3. If the tubing has become disconnected.

Changing your drainage bottle

The steps below give instructions on how to change your bottle at home, if necessary. A nurse will demonstrate this for you before you are discharged from hospital.



1. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Close the clip on the tubing of the bottle to be changed.



2. Close the clip to the bottle to be changed.



3. Disconnect the tube from the bottle by unscrewing the luer lock (connector).

4. Screw on the new bottle. Make sure it is on tightly as loose connections can lead to loss of suction.



5. Open the clip on the tubing.



6. Open the clip on the bottle.

How to record the redivac drainage over 24 hours

If appropriate, the ward nurse will ask you to measure your drainage on a daily basis. This may not be necessary, depending on the type of surgery you have had.

If you are asked to measure, you may use the chart at the back of this booklet to record the amount of fluid in the drainage bottle every day. The nurses will show you how to do this. After you have recorded your daily drainage on the chart and bottle please call the ward to let them know of your daily output.

Possible problems

If the following problems occur, **please do not panic**. Just follow the advice below:

- **If the drain falls out**, simply place the gauze pad provided over the small wound where the drain was inserted, secure the pad with tape and telephone the ward. Please do not dispose of the tubing or the bottle until you have spoken to the ward and been given instructions. Usually the tubing will have a stitch in it to prevent it from falling out.
- **If your tubing becomes disconnected anywhere**, place the gauze pad provided over the tube coming from the operation area, secure it with tape and contact the ward for advice. Please do not dispose of the tubing or the bottle until you have spoken to the ward and been given instructions.
- **If you have excess leakage from the area where the drain comes from**, cover it with the gauze pad, secure with some tape and contact the ward for advice.
- **Infection** You will have had an antibiotic injection either during or after your operation. Before you go home, a chlorhexidine (mild antiseptic) disk will be placed at the drain site where it enters your body to help prevent infection.

If you are concerned about any redness, heat, swelling, bruising, and/or pain that you may have, please contact the ward or Macmillan specialist nurses on the numbers below for advice.

Removal of the drain

The drain will usually be removed when the fluid collected is clear and is equal to, or less than, 30mls in a 24 hour period.

Before you are discharged from hospital, a plan will have been put in place for the removal of the drain once the volume of drainage has reduced. This is usually arranged by your discharge nurse and may involve making arrangements for you to attend the plastics dressing clinic (PDC) in the main outpatients department to have the drain removed and your dressings changed.

Only in exceptional circumstances will the district/community nurse come out to your home.

Tips:

- Loose clothing that opens easily is generally easier to wear while you have your drain in.
- Ensure there are no kinks or folds in the tubing and the drain bottle is kept below the level of your heart.
- If applicable, a well-fitted, comfortable non-wired bra is helpful to reduce swelling and gives support after breast surgery.
- A small, comfortable pillow tucked under your arm/between your legs (while you sleep or travel) may help to take pressure off the drain tubes and operation site.
- When lying in bed or sitting in a chair place the bottle upright on the floor.

Your follow up appointment for review in the Plastics Dressings Clinic is:

On: _____ at: _____

Useful telephone numbers

Should you have any further questions or need further advice or information please do not hesitate to contact the hospital.

Department	Direct line
Margaret Duncombe Ward	01342 414450
Ross Tilley Ward	01342 414451
Macmillan Breast Reconstruction Nurse Specialists	01342 414302 / 414306
Macmillan Head & Neck Nurse Specialists	01342 414493 / 414076
Macmillan Skin Cancer Nurse Specialists	01342 306660
Plastics Dressing Clinic (PDC)	01342 414442
Hospital Switchboard	01342 414000
Appointments line	01342 414141
Pharmacy	01342 414214
Psychological Therapies	01342 414478

For emergencies **out of hours**, please call switchboard on 01342 414000 and ask to speak to the doctor on call or the site practitioner.

Fluid collection record chart

Patient's name _____

Hospital number: V _____

Day	Date	Daily amount in mls.
1		mls
2		mls
3		mls
4		mls
5		mls
6		mls
7		mls
8		mls
9		mls
10		mls
11		mls
12		mls
13		mls
14		mls

This information has been adapted from the leaflet called 'Going home with a redivac drain after surgery' produced by Guys and St Thomas' Hospital NHS Foundation Trust with their kind permission.



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

Issue 4 – Ref: no. 0522
Approved by the QVH Patient Information Group
Print Jan 2019 – Review March 2025

www.qvh.nhs.uk