WATERFRONT
PRIVATE HOSPITAL

PATIENT INFORMATION · AFTERCARE

Breast Implant Removal/Exchange Aftercare

General recovery guidance for breast implant removal or exchange surgery based on Waterfront Private Hospital's aftercare protocols. This online guide should be used alongside the official leaflet and the specific instructions given to you by your surgical team.

Typical recovery: 4–6 weeks for full recovery · Reviewed 12 November 2026 · Version 1.1

Having your surgery at Spire? Your nursing care after surgery, including wound checks and dressings, is at Spire. Please follow the discharge instructions Spire gives you, and contact Spire using the number on your discharge paperwork, not the Waterfront advice line. Your later follow-up is at Waterfront. The general recovery advice in this leaflet still applies.

When to get help — your traffic light guide

RED

Call 999 or go to A&E now if you have:

These can be life-threatening. Do not wait to call the hospital first.

- Sudden severe chest pain or trouble breathing
- Heavy bleeding that won't stop
- Signs of blood clot (painful, swollen leg, chest pain, shortness of breath)
- High temperature (over 38°C) with confusion or unusual drowsiness

AMBER

Contact us now — do not wait — if you have:

- One breast suddenly much larger than the other (if exchange)
- High fever (over 38°C) with severe pain
- Signs of infection with spreading redness

Office hours (Mon–Fri 9am–5pm): 0131 376 3785

Evenings and weekends during your early recovery: Out-of-Hours Nurse Advice Line 07405322689 — our nurse can advise you, contact your surgeon, or direct you to NHS services.

After your early recovery period: call the hospital in office hours, or NHS 24 on 111.

Had your surgery at Spire Shawfair Park (overnight stay)? Contact Spire directly using the number on your discharge paperwork — not the Waterfront advice line.

GREEN

Tell us at your next appointment:

Anything else that is niggling or worrying you — no concern is too small. Mention it at your next appointment, or call us during office hours.

Related Information Leaflets

Separate leaflets about the procedure itself — not the aftercare instructions above. Tap a title to download, or find them all on your procedure page in the portal.

- Breast Implant Illness, Information (https://waterfront-patient-portal.netlify.app/waterfrontaftercare/bii_information_1.pdf)

How to Use This Information

The advice below is based on Waterfront Private Hospital's written aftercare protocols. It is general guidance for the average patient and may be adapted by your consultant for your individual circumstances.

Always follow the specific instructions given to you on the day of your surgery and in your printed leaflet. If there is ever a difference, follow your consultant's written or verbal instructions and contact us for clarification.

Post-Operative Checklist

- Use a well-fitting soft support bra as advised by your surgeon
- Sleep in whatever position is comfortable, most patients avoid lying on their front for the first couple of weeks because it's tender
- You can shower from day 1 (unless your surgeon says otherwise), it's fine if the outer dressings get damp; pat dry gently
- Take prescribed antibiotics as directed
- Attend all scheduled follow-up appointments
- Avoid lifting heavy objects (over 5kg) and strenuous upper body exercise for 6 weeks, or as advised

- If drain in place: monitor output and care for drain as instructed

Wound Care

- Shower from day 1 is fine (unless your surgeon says otherwise), pat dressings dry gently afterwards
- Change dressings as instructed by your surgeon
- After first week, gently clean incisions with mild soap and water
- Apply recommended scar cream after sutures removed (usually 10–14 days)
- Watch for signs of infection: redness, swelling, discharge, or fever
- Do not submerge in bath, pool, or hot tub for 4–6 weeks
- If capsulectomy performed: expect more swelling than simple removal

Pain Management

- Take your painkillers as directed on their labels, every medicine you go home with is labelled with its dose and frequency, and your nurse will go through them with you before you leave. Paracetamol and ibuprofen can safely be taken together
- Take prescribed pain medication as directed
- Some discomfort, tightness, and swelling is normal
- Use cold packs (wrapped in towel) for first 48 hours to reduce swelling
- Swelling typically peaks at 48–72 hours, then gradually decreases
- Wearing supportive bra helps reduce discomfort
- Most pain subsides significantly after first week
- If capsulectomy performed: pain and swelling may be greater

Activity Restrictions

- No lifting over 5kg for 6 weeks
- No driving for first week or until off pain medication
- Light activities and walking are encouraged from day 1
- You can use your arms normally for light tasks from the start; avoid forceful or repetitive overhead activity for the first 2–3 weeks if it pulls or hurts
- Return to work: usually 1–2 weeks for desk jobs, 4–6 weeks for physical work (your surgeon will confirm)
- No exercise except gentle walking for at least 2–3 weeks

- Gradually resume exercise after 4–6 weeks with surgeon approval

Understanding Your Procedure

Implant Removal Only

If you are having implants removed without replacement, your surgeon removes the implants and closes the incisions. The natural breast tissue remains.

- Recovery is generally slightly easier than with exchange
- Breasts will appear smaller and may seem deflated initially
- Tissue will settle and improve over weeks
- You may consider a breast lift later if desired
- Appearance depends on your skin elasticity and how long you had implants
- **Implant Exchange (Removal + New Implants)**, If you are having implants exchanged, old implants are removed and new implants are inserted during the same surgery.
- Recovery is similar to breast augmentation
- New implants may feel high and firm initially
- Implants settle into position over 3–6 months
- Support bra is particularly important for proper positioning
- Final appearance becomes apparent once swelling resolves
- **Capsulectomy (if performed)**, Your surgeon may remove the scar tissue (capsule) that forms around implants. This is more involved than simple implant removal.
- Capsulectomy is performed if you have capsular contracture or implant concerns
- Expect more swelling and bruising than simple removal
- Recovery takes slightly longer (allow extra week or two)
- You may have a drain to prevent fluid buildup
- Pain may be slightly more significant in first week

Before You Leave the Hospital

- **Painkillers:** Make sure you have your painkillers before you leave, the nurse looking after you will go through them with you.
- **Follow-up appointments:** You will be given a card with details of your first dressing clinic / follow-up appointment and contact details for the ward if you have any concerns once you get home.
- **Drain care (if applicable):** If a drain was placed, you will receive detailed instructions on monitoring output and when it will be removed.

- **Getting home safely:** You must have someone to take you home and a **responsible adult with you for the first night**.

Information on Support Bras

A well-fitting support bra made of soft fabric can provide comfort and support during the first few weeks following implant removal or exchange.

The bra is mainly for **support and comfort**. It helps:

- Reduce swelling and discomfort
- Provide gentle support to healing tissues
- Provide gentle support and comfort while new implants settle (if exchange)
- Allow better sleep and rest
- Your surgeon will advise you on the type of bra to wear and how long you should wear it (for example, day and night for the first 4 to 6 weeks after removal alone, or the first 2 to 3 months after an exchange).

Medication Guide

Regular Pain Relief

- **Strong Pain Relief (if prescribed)**
- **Dihydrocodeine:** Only if regular painkillers aren't enough
- Take only as prescribed. Do not exceed recommended dose. May cause constipation - see Laxatives section below.
- **Other Medications**
- **Antibiotics:** Complete the full course if prescribed, even if you feel better
- **Laxatives:** Use if constipated from painkillers (common side effect of dihydrocodeine)

Support Bra Guide

Why a Support Bra Matters

- Reduces swelling and discomfort
- Provides gentle support to healing tissues
- If exchange: gentle support and comfort while the new implants settle
- Allows better sleep and faster healing

- **Bra Requirements**
- No underwiring
- Front opening (not over head)
- Adjustable straps
- Soft, seamless fabric
- Correct band size (measure accurately)
- **How Long to Wear**
- **Weeks 1–4:** 24/7 (day and night)
- **Weeks 4–6:** During the day and when in public
- **After 6 weeks:** As comfortable, transition to normal supportive bras
- **If you had an exchange (new implants):** As a guide, day and night for the first 2 to 3 months, then during the day for up to about 6 months if you can
- **Additional Bras of Your Choice**, High Street Options: M&S, Tesco, ASDA, John Lewis
- Specialist Brands:
- Macom Signature Bra (https://www.macom-medical.com/products/signature-bra)
- Lipoelastic PI Ideal (https://www.lipoelastic.co.uk/pi-ideal)
- Lipoelastic PI Relax (https://www.lipoelastic.co.uk/pi-relax) (use code QUABA for discount)
- **Your first bra:** At Waterfront we provide you with a Macom post-surgical bra, and our nursing team will fit it before you go home. You do not need to bring one.

Scar Care

When to Start, Begin at week 5 if wounds are fully healed and sutures have been removed

The Routine

- **Tape (3–5 days):** Apply Micropore tape to scars
- **Moisturise (1–2 days):** Remove tape, apply plain moisturiser
- **Repeat** this cycle for 4–6 months
- **Products to Use**
- **Tape:** Micropore 3M (from pharmacy, around £5)
- **Moisturiser:** Aveeno, E45, or Bio-Oil
- **Scar Timeline**
- **3 months:** Scars still pink/red
- **6 months:** Fading to lighter colour
- **1 year:** Final appearance (usually very faint)
- **Note:** Incisions are typically placed in inconspicuous locations to minimise visible scarring. Scars fade remarkably well with proper care and time.

Lifestyle Guidelines

✓ **DO**

- Walk regularly from day 1
- Eat healthy foods rich in protein
- Drink plenty of water
- Sleep well (use pillows for elevation)
- Take medications as directed
- Attend all appointments
- Wear support bra 24/7 for first 4–6 weeks (2 to 3 months after an exchange)
- Allow time to adjust emotionally
- ***✗ AVOID***
- Smoking (severely delays healing)
- Alcohol for 2–3 weeks
- Heavy lifting for 6 weeks
- Strenuous exercise for 4–6 weeks
- Underwired bras for 6–8 weeks
- Swimming until wounds fully healed
- Direct sun on scars for 1 year

Your Recovery, Stage by Stage

Days 1–3 — Early Recovery

Immediate post-surgery care and adjustment

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Significant swelling and bruising
- Discomfort and tightness in chest
- Tiredness and need for rest
- Some drainage from incision sites
- If removal only: breasts may appear deflated initially
- If exchange: new implants may feel high and firm

CARE ROUTINE

- Wear surgical support bra 24/7 as instructed
- Rest with head/torso elevated (2-3 pillows)
- Apply cold compresses to reduce swelling (20 min on, 20 min off)

- Keep dressings clean and dry
- Take prescribed pain medication (including dihydrocodeine if prescribed)
- Light walking only (to bathroom)
- Sleep in whatever position is comfortable
- Allow yourself time to adjust emotionally to appearance changes

COMFORT

- Take painkillers on schedule (don't wait for pain)
- Paracetamol and ibuprofen as directed
- Use ice packs wrapped in towel (never directly on skin)
- Report uncontrolled pain immediately

Days 4–7 — Improving Daily

Gradual reduction in swelling and discomfort

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Gradual reduction in swelling and bruising
- Discomfort decreasing daily
- Feeling more mobile
- Energy levels gradually improving
- May experience occasional twinges or zaps
- If capsulectomy performed: more swelling than simple removal

CARE ROUTINE

- Continue wearing support bra continuously
- Gentle cleaning of incisions if dressings removed
- Light activities around the house
- Short, gentle walks (5–10 minutes)
- Continue elevation when resting
- Attend first follow-up appointment (usually day 7)
- Avoid forceful overhead activity if it pulls or hurts
- If drain in place: monitor and care for as instructed

COMFORT

- Pain should be significantly reduced
- May reduce to paracetamol/ibuprofen only
- Continue medication as needed
- Less need for strong painkillers

Week 2 — Increased Activity

Gradual return to light activities

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Noticeable reduction in swelling
- Bruising fading to yellow/green
- Feeling much more like yourself
- Adjusting to new appearance
- Some numbness or tingling may persist

CARE ROUTINE

- Continue support bra as instructed
- Can return to desk work if comfortable
- Gentle stretching of arms (below shoulder height)
- Short walks outside (10–15 minutes)
- Light household tasks (no heavy lifting)
- Begin scar care if instructed
- Can usually return to work if desk-based
- Avoid strenuous activities

COMFORT

- Minimal pain medication needed
- Occasional discomfort with certain movements
- Most discomfort resolved

Weeks 3–4 — Mostly Healed

Significant improvement in healing

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Significant improvement in appearance
- Most swelling resolved
- Final shape becoming more apparent
- If removal only: tissue settling into natural position
- Feeling confident with results
- Returning to normal activities

CARE ROUTINE

- After removal alone, can transition to supportive sports bras; after an exchange, keep wearing the post-surgical bra
- Can resume most normal daily activities
- Light exercise may be permitted (with approval)

- Continue scar care with recommended products
- Can raise arms fully
- Protect from sun exposure

COMFORT

- No pain medication typically needed
- Full range of motion restored
- Occasional mild discomfort possible

Months 2–3 — Final Settling

Complete healing and tissue adjustment

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Final shape fully apparent
- All swelling completely resolved
- If exchange: implants settling into position
- Scars significantly faded
- Feeling completely normal
- Full range of motion

CARE ROUTINE

- Can wear normal supportive bras
- Avoid underwire bras for several more weeks
- Full exercise with surgeon approval
- Continue sun protection on scars
- Your surgeon sees you at around 6 months, or sooner if you have any concerns

COMFORT

- No pain expected
- Comfortable with all activities
- Full recovery achieved

Month 6+ — Complete Recovery

Optimal healing achieved

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Final results fully visible
- Scars well-healed and faded
- Complete return to all activities
- Confident with appearance
- Can wear any bra style

CARE ROUTINE

- Can wear any bra style (including underwire if comfortable)
- All activities permitted
- Regular exercise including upper body
- Continue long-term care as advised
- Annual check-ups as recommended

COMFORT

- No pain expected
- Full recovery achieved
- Contact team if any concerns arise

Follow-Up Appointments

Week 1 (Days 7–10) — First post-operative appointment to check healing, remove dressings (if applicable), and assess early recovery.

- Wound inspection
- Dressing removal (if applicable)
- If applicable: drain removal or care review
- Assessment of healing progress
- Review of care instructions

Further nurse reviews, as needed — Some patients need further nurse reviews. If so, the nurses will arrange these with you and will discharge you from nurse-led care once they are happy your wounds have healed.

Around 6 months: surgeon review (final follow-up) — Your surgeon will usually see you at around 6 months to assess your final result. Your surgeon is always available to review you sooner if required, and in some circumstances may wish to see you before your final follow-up.

Your appointment schedule may vary. Always follow the specific dates and times given in your appointment card. Contact us if you need to reschedule.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will my breasts look like after removal?

If implants are removed without replacement, breasts may initially appear deflated or loose. Over several weeks, tissue will settle. Final appearance depends on breast tissue, skin elasticity, and whether you had implants for many years. Gravity will gradually improve the appearance.

Will I need a breast lift after removal?

Some patients benefit from a breast lift to improve shape after implant removal, especially if they had implants for many years. This is discussed during your consultation. Some patients choose to have this done at the same time as removal; others prefer to wait and see how tissues settle.

How long until I see my final shape?

Tissue will continue to settle for 3–6 months. Initial shape is visible by week 6, but final appearance becomes apparent by month 3 as swelling completely resolves.

Is it normal to feel emotional about my appearance?

Absolutely. Your breasts will look different from what you have been used to for years. This is a significant change and emotional reactions are completely normal. Many patients feel sad, disappointed, or relieved initially. Give yourself time to adjust - most patients adapt within weeks.

When can I wear normal bras?

After 4–6 weeks, you can transition to supportive sports bras. Avoid underwire bras for at least 6–8 weeks. You can wear regular bras by months 2–3 as directed by your surgeon. If you had new implants put in (an exchange), as a guide wear your post-surgical bra day and night for the first 2 to 3 months, then during the day for up to about 6 months if you can.

Can I have new implants inserted later?

Yes. If you have implants removed and later decide you want them replaced, you can usually have a new surgery. However, if you are having exchange (removal and new implants), this happens during your current surgery.

What is capsulectomy and why might I have it?

The body forms scar tissue (capsule) around implants. Capsulectomy is removal of this scar tissue, usually done if you have capsular contracture (hardening), implant rupture, or concerns about old implant material. Recovery is similar but with more swelling.

Will I have drains after surgery?

Your surgeon may use drains to prevent fluid buildup, especially if capsulectomy is performed. If you have a drain, you will be shown how to care for it and when it will be removed (usually within 1–2 weeks).