How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk
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Breast reconstruction with a DIEP flap
Going home after major surgery can be challenging, but hopefully this information will help you with your recovery and managing possible queries and prevent complications.

Why do I feel tired?
After major surgery it will take time for you to feel like yourself and you will become tired more easily. This can last between six weeks to three months post surgery.

Wearing surgical bra and abdominal binder
- We recommend wearing the bra provided whilst in hospital or a sports bra for 6 weeks after your operation, 23 hours /day
- The abdominal binder is important to strengthen your donor site. This is provided whilst in hospital and should be worn for 6 weeks, 23 hours /day; removal only for showering
- It is normal to find it difficult to stand straight or lie flat for a few weeks post surgery. Try sleeping at a 45° angle with pillows under your legs to reduce tension on your abdomen.

Follow Up Appointments

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Please use this space to write down any questions you have

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Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis post surgery

Anti-embolic stockings (TEDS) and Fragmin injections

- As discussed with your consultant prior to your operation TEDs and Fragmin are part of your treatment to prevent DVTs (Deep vein thrombosis)
- You need to wear your TEDs stockings until you have returned to normal mobility. This is usually for 6 weeks
- You will be discharged with 5-10 days of Fragmin. This is a small injection that is given into your thigh (do not use your tummy area as this is where you have had your surgery and may cause bleeding).
- Training for this will be provided by the ward staff prior to discharge.
- You will need to give these injections yourself. If you are unable to do so, a relative or friend needs to be available to help with this.
- We can only organise a district nurse/practice nurse to give Fragmin injections if you have a mobility/dexterity problem.
- A sharps box will be provided on discharge for your used needles. Once finished you can return this box to your GP surgery or when you attend a follow up appointment.

Important advice to all surgical patients!

- Please ensure you seek help and advice from the hospital, your GP or A&E if you begin to suffer from any of the following:
  - pain/swelling/heat in the calves
  - difference in leg shape/width from one side to the other
  - shortness of breath

Returning to work

- If you require a fitness to work certificate we can provide this on discharge.
- Depending on individual recovery and type of work this may be between 6 weeks to 3 months.

What exercise can I do?

It is important to build up your activity level slowly. Therefore you are advised to:

- Avoid heavy lifting for 6 weeks (this includes housework like vacuuming, lifting children or carrying heavy shopping, dog walking with care).
- Avoid driving until you are able to do an emergency stop; this is usually 3-4 weeks post surgery.
- You may want to contact your insurance provider to inform them of your surgery.
- Refrain from sexual activity for 3 weeks post surgery, with care taken for another 3 weeks.

DIEP-related complications

What is a Seroma?
A seroma is a clear fluid collection in the wound. Your body may absorb this fluid or you may need this to be drained.

What is Fat Necrosis?
This normally becomes more noticeable where the wounds have healed, mainly on the breast reconstruction site. It usually feels hard and lumpy to touch. If you feel any unusual lumps these should be discussed with your consultant at your follow up appointment.
Dressings
• Before you leave hospital your wounds will be checked and should have clean and dry dressings applied
• We will follow you up in our plastic dressings clinic for a wound check at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in 2-5 days after discharge.
• After this first wound check by our team, you will be advised to shower/clean your wounds and dry them with a clean towel. Showers only, no baths. This is to help prevent risks of infection
• We may advise you to apply brown tape to cover your scars for a period of 4-6 weeks. This can improve the quality of your scars. Discuss this with your Consultant.

Going home with a drain
• After your operation, you will have drains in your tummy and in the area that you had the reconstruction. Usually these are all removed prior to discharge home
• However sometimes there may still be too much blood or fluid draining for these to be removed. Some drains may therefore need to stay in at the point of discharge
• We will follow you up 2-3 days after discharge and drains are usually removed at this point.

Pain Relief
• It is important that you take the pain relief medication as prescribed. You will be given a 14 day supply of medication on discharge home. Afterwards please see your GP for further prescriptions after this.
• Please ensure you have Paracetamol at home as this will not be provided on discharge.
• Only take aspirin if you have a previous medical condition that requires aspirin use, as it can otherwise increase the risk of bleeding.

Hormonotherapy medications
• If you have been asked to stop your Tamoxifen prior to surgery, you can restart two weeks post surgery
• Aromatase inhibitors (such as Anastrazole) are usually not stopped prior to surgery, and you can continue taking them as per usual.

Infection
It is essential that you recognise signs and symptoms which may indicate infection. Infections can occur at any point after surgery. Signs and symptoms of infection to be aware of are:
• Redness/ inflammation to incision sites that is spreading and painful to touch
• Excessive oozing on dressings
• Offensive smell from dressings
• Increased pain in the area that has been operated on (especially if not previously painful) and not relieved by pain relief
• Temperature – flu like symptoms feeling hot and cold or shivering.

Scar management
• Be aware that scars take approximately 18-24 months to mature, i.e. to become flatter, paler and softer
• Massaging scars on a daily basis for 10 minutes, 3-4 times a day can help improve scar quality and prevent itchiness
• You can use a non-perfumed moisturizing cream such as E45 (or any cream/oil of your preference)
• Please use sun block cream factor 50 if exposed to the sun for the first 2 years post-surgery.