

Your Guide to: Bras and Breast Prostheses After Breast Surgery with Drains

For patients who are having or have had one or more of these surgeries (with drains put in):

- **Mastectomy**
- **Axillary node dissection**
- **Breast reconstruction**

Read this resource to learn:

- About your breast surgery
- What to expect after surgery
- What a breast prosthesis is
- How to choose the right breast prosthesis after surgery
- Where to find more information

Read this guide to learn how to pick the right bra and breast prosthesis for you.



What bra should I wear after breast surgery?

Your need for bras and breast prostheses (breast-shaped piece worn inside bras to look like the shape of a real breast) will change before and after surgery. This is because your body can change after surgery and the bras you wore before may not fit.

Your needs may change from the time you have breast surgery, until the time you feel healed and ready to go back to the bras you used before your surgery.

You will recover in 3 phases (sets of time) after breast surgery:

Phase 1: Week 1 (day of surgery to 6 days after surgery).

During this time, you can wear special tops to help you heal, and have breast drains inserted (put in).

Phase 2: Week 2 to Week 5.

During this time, you can start wearing bras again. You will also have your breast drains removed.

Phase 3: Week 6 and onwards.

During this time, you can use breast prostheses, bras and can wear the clothes you used before surgery.

Keep reading to learn more about each phase after breast surgery, and the types of bras and breast prostheses you can use.

Phase 1: Week 1 (day of surgery to 6 days after surgery)

What should I wear right after breast surgery?

For the first week after your surgery, you will not want to wear a wired bra. This is because your chest can be sore and the drains will be in place. Wearing a normal bra can cause you pain, or irritate the area where you had surgery.

If you had a lumpectomy, we recommend that you wear a wireless bra 24 hours a day for the first week or two.

If you had a mastectomy, it is up to you if you'd like to wear a bra or camisole unless otherwise told by your surgical team.

Some bras are more comfortable than others to wear during this time.

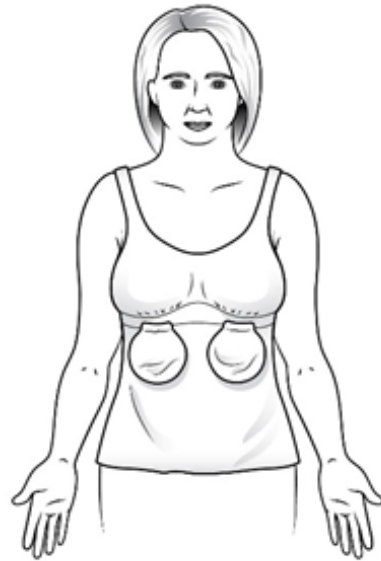
- You have the option to wear a bra or camisole right after mastectomy surgery (with or without reconstruction). Not every person will find this comfortable.
- You can wear a bra without underwire right after surgery, as long as there is no pressure to drain the site.
- Use bras that you can put on without having to raise your arms such as one you pull on over your hips or bras with a **clasp in the front or back**.
- Stores that make bras and other clothing to wear after breast surgery sometimes call these types of bras "post-surgical garments" or "post-surgical bra".

Read below to learn more about clothing that is helpful and safe to wear during this phase.

Post-surgical camisoles (tank tops)

Some stores sell long, post-surgical camisoles (tops with no sleeves) you can use right after breast surgery. Post-surgical camisoles are very useful for people who feel sore or sensitive in the breast area.

This is an image of a post-surgical camisole. Breast drains can be held inside the pouches on the front, below the breasts.



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Post-surgical camisoles:

- are made with soft, stretchy cotton to support the breast(s) that you had surgery on
- have seams that do not rub or irritate (bother) your skin
- have pockets for the drains
- have pockets in the breast area that can hold soft fibre-fills (fibre in the shape of a breast, placed on the side you had surgery)

Extra fibre-fill can be added to the pockets to get a size closer to the size of your other breast.

Important: Call the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation to get fibre-fill at no cost: 416 596 6773.

- can be pulled up over your hips

This lets you move comfortably. You do not have to worry about the movement in your arms and shoulder.

Post-surgical bras

Post-surgical bras are styles of bras you can wear while healing after breast surgery.

- Post-surgical bras can give you comfort and protect your incisions (cuts made on your breast during surgery) as you heal. See the image to the right.



- Post-surgical bras open from the front using a zipper, hooks or velcro. They are easy to take on and off. See the image to the right.



They can also come with fibre fills and pockets for the drains.

Use a post-surgical bra that you can:

- pull up over your hips to put on with ease
- put on using a front closing (such as a zipper, hooks or Velcro) or back closure
- wear without it hugging your chest too tight or leaving imprints after you take it off
- use as you begin to get your shoulder and arm movement back

Post-surgical camisoles and bras are sold at mastectomy stores (stores that sell bras and breast prostheses to for after breast surgery).

Read the pamphlet called “Know Where to Buy Bras and Breast Prostheses After Breast Surgery” for a list of stores that sell post-surgical camisoles. Ask a member of your health care team for a copy, or visit the Patient & Family Library (main floor of the Princess Margaret) to pick one up. Visit this web page to read the pamphlet online:

https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Know_where_to_buy_bras_after_breast_surgery.pdf

Phase 2: Week 2 After Surgery to Week 5

What should I wear after my breast drains are removed?

During this time, your breast drains are removed. After your drains are removed, your chest will need to finish healing.

It may be too soon to go back to using your normal bras if you still feel sore or sensitive in the breast area. See how you feel.

Some people choose to continue wearing camisole, surgical bra, or a wireless bra depending on what is comfortable.

Phase 3: Week 6 After Surgery and Onwards

During this time, your breast/chest may still feel swollen and tender. For this reason, **wait 6 to 8 weeks after surgery before getting fitted for a new bra.**

When you are ready to get fitted for a new bra (if needed):

- See a bra-fitter trained in mastectomy and lumpectomy clothes. They can help you find the right bra for you.
- Your bra should be fitted for the larger breast.
- The cost of a bra-fitter can vary. Ask each bra store or bra-fitter about the cost of their services.

What do I need to know about wearing a bra during this time?

Any bra style can be used with a breast prosthesis as long as:

- The bra is the right fit
- The bra can keep the breast prosthesis in place (if you have one)

About Breast Prostheses

What is a breast prosthesis?

A prosthesis is an artificial (not real) replacement of a body part that has been removed, or changed. More than one prosthesis is called prostheses.

Breast prostheses are used to replace a whole breast, or part of a breast, that may have been removed or changed during breast surgery.

People who choose to wear a breast prosthesis may want to use a nipple prosthesis too, if their nipple was changed or removed during surgery.

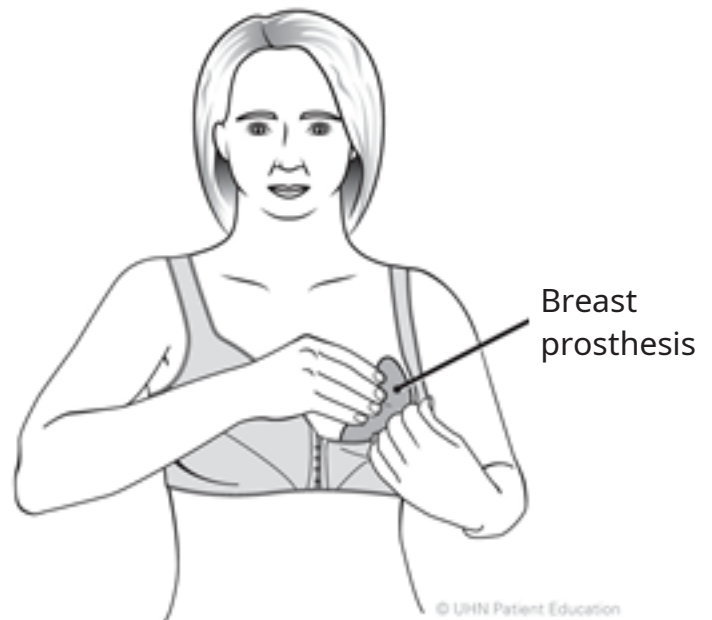
Breast prostheses are easy to wear. They can be worn:

- Right on top of your skin
- In a bra with a pocket to hold the prosthesis, called a “mastectomy bra”

Breast prostheses can be made from:

- silicone gel
- foam
- fibre-fill

This is an image of a breast prosthesis. You can get breast prostheses that match your skin colour or skin tone, and match the shape of your breast.



Breast prostheses help to keep your bras in place. A prosthesis that fits well will keep your bra from riding up, or shifting from side to side.

Breast prostheses can be worn for a short time (short-term prostheses) or a long time after surgery (long-term prostheses).

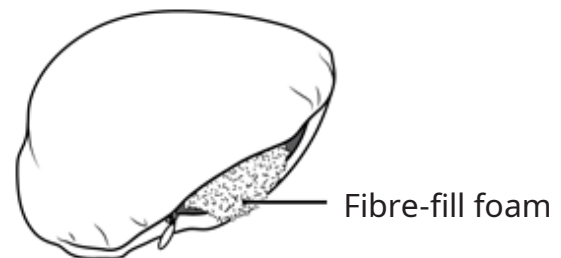
Short-term breast prostheses

For the first 6 weeks after your surgery, your chest will likely be sensitive as it heals. At this time it may be helpful to wear soft, short-term breast prostheses.

You have 2 main options for short-term breast prostheses:

- 1. Fibre-fill foams.** You can buy soft, fluffy fibre-fill foams and put them in the pockets of post- surgical camisoles or in post-surgical bras. Over time you may need to change or replace the fibre- fill inside the foams as they get old or become flat.

This is an image of fibre-fill foam. Place more or less fibre-fill inside the pocket to make it bigger, until your breasts look evenly shaped.



- 2. Ready-made, soft foam breast prostheses (also called “leisure breast forms”).** Leisure breast forms come in many shapes and sizes. This type of prosthesis is not as heavy as the normal, ready-made breast prostheses.

Leisure breast forms can give you more comfort during this phase, since your chest is still sensitive. But, you cannot adjust the size or contents (what is inside) of leisure breast forms.

What are my options for long-term breast prostheses?

Choosing to wear long-term breast prostheses is a personal choice. Many people want to look the same when wearing clothes from before their surgery.

A long-term breast prosthesis that fits well can:

- Give you physical comfort
- Give you confidence in your body image
- Help restore your appearance to the way it was before surgery

A long-term breast prosthesis is made to last longer than a short-term prosthesis. A long-term breast prosthesis is a good long-term option for when your chest has healed from breast surgery.

If you choose to wear a long-term breast prosthesis, you have 2 options:

1. Ready-made (store bought) breast prostheses
2. Custom-made (made just for you) breast prostheses

Read below for more details on both kinds of long-term breast prostheses

Ready-made (store bought) breast prostheses

These breast prostheses can be bought in stores and are not unique to your breast shape only. Ready-made breast prostheses are also called “off the shelf”, “prefabricated” or “store bought” breast prostheses. They come in many shapes, sizes, weights and colours.

Ready-made, full breast prostheses cost less than ready-made, partial prostheses. This is because a partial prosthesis replaces the shape of only a part of the breast, while a full prosthesis replaces the whole breast.

A breast care specialist can help you choose the best breast prostheses for you. They can help you find products to fit any of your unique needs.

More about ready-made (store bought) breast prostheses:

- This type of prosthesis is not often used until about 6 months after you heal from breast surgery.
- For a ready-made breast prosthesis to be comfortable and stay in place, the bra must also be the right fit and size.
- Ready-made breast prosthesis often have a back surface that molds to the curves of your chest. These designs can absorb or take heat away from your skin and are good to use in warm weather.
- You do not need to use “weighted” or heavy ready-made prosthesis to keep them in place, or for any other health reason. Choose a light or heavy prosthesis based on your needs.
- The cost of ready-made prostheses can vary, so choose one that best suits your budget and lifestyle.

Custom-made (made just for you) breast prostheses

A custom-made breast prosthesis is designed just for you and made to restore the area where breast tissue was removed during your surgery.

Custom-made breast prostheses support the remaining breast in place when you use a normal bra. They allow you to wear low cut bras and have cleavage showing.

This type of prosthesis can be:

- “Made to measure”. This means it is made to fit a copy of your chest wall. This will make it a better fit.
- Made to be the exact mirror image of the breast that did not have surgery, so your breasts look evenly shaped.
- Made with softer, lighter materials. This means less weight is put on your chest.
- Used with most regular bras. You do not need to change how you dress to wear them. This can reduce the stress of buying new clothes.

How do I begin choosing the best long-term breast prosthesis for me?

Each person who has had breast surgery has unique needs. Not everyone will need or want a breast prosthesis. Not everyone who chooses to wear a long-term breast prosthesis will choose the same kind.

Choosing the right breast prosthesis after breast surgery can be tough. It is important that the breast prosthesis you choose is comfortable (fits you well) and fits the bras you wear.

Can I go swimming while wearing a ready-made or custom-made breast prosthesis?

Yes. After breast surgery, you do not have to use a special swimsuit. But you may find that your breast prosthesis fits some swimsuits better than others.

Keep a few things in mind before swimming:

- Try not to use a breast prosthesis made of silicone. Chlorine (chemical used to clean pools) can damage silicone breast prostheses.
- If you are not swimming in a pool, like on a beach, you can wear normal breast prostheses. But a normal prosthesis is heavier than a prosthesis made for swimming.

Do I have to pay for ready-made or custom breast prostheses?

Yes. But you can get financial support to help cover the cost of ready-made and custom-made breast prostheses.

- Everyone in Ontario with a valid Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card, who needs breast prosthesis due to surgery, can get a grant (money) from the Ministry of Health's Assistive Devices Program (ADP). This grant helps cover the cost of buying ready-made or custom-made breast prostheses. Visit this website for details on how to apply for the grant: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/breast-prostheses-and-artificial-limbs>.
- Some community programs help pay for mastectomy bras, breast prostheses, and swimwear to use after breast surgery.
- If you have concerns about money and buying bras or breast prostheses, a social worker maybe be able to help you with this.
- If you have private health insurance, check to see if they cover the costs of these products before you contact the stores. Or use a bra and breast prostheses store that has worked with your insurance company before.

If You are Having Breast Reconstructive Surgery

Breast reconstructive surgery re-builds the breast shape. Not everyone will have breast reconstructive surgery.

If you have had or are having breast reconstructive surgery, read below to know what kind of bra and breast prostheses to use.

What kind of bra should I use after breast reconstructive surgery?

- If asked by your surgeon, wear a supportive, post-surgery bra meant for after breast reconstruction. This type of bra has Velcro straps that cross your chest for support.

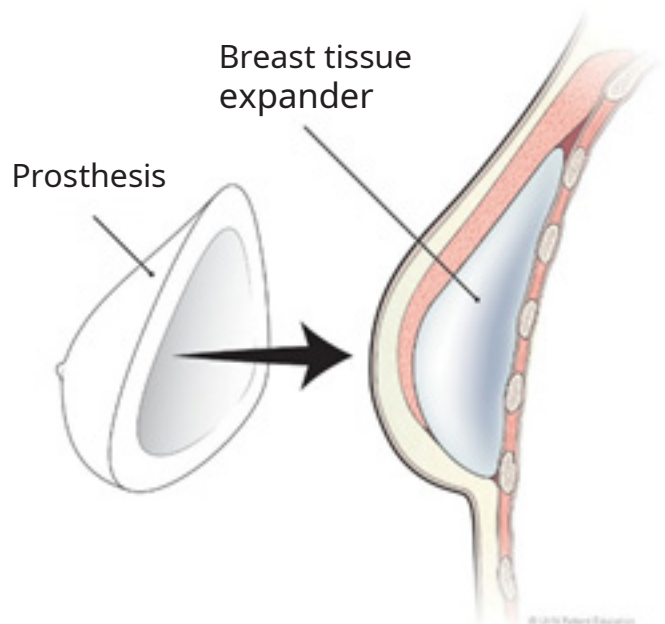
Wearing a soft, front-closing sports bra is a better option after breast reconstruction. Do not use an underwire bra for many months after reconstruction, and remove the underwire from any bras you wear during this time.

Talk to your surgeon or Clinical Nurse Specialist about what bras will best meet your needs.

What breast prostheses should I use if I have a breast tissue expander?

You may get a tissue expander as part of the reconstructive breast surgery which is a temporary implant that is filled with normal saline (salt water) gradually to expand (add size and shape) and create space to make room for the breast implant(s).

This is an image of a breast tissue expander. A breast tissue expander is a balloon-like device that stretches breast skin and chest wall muscles over time. This makes room for any implants to be put in.



Stores that make ready-made breast prostheses also make breast prostheses for people who have a breast tissue expander. This type of breast prosthesis is made with a hollow back surface and many inserts that can be removed from the back of the prosthesis as the volume (size) of your tissue expander increases.



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