



FACTSHEET



information on **living with breast cancer**

Breast Prostheses

This factsheet is for those who would like more information on breast prostheses. It describes what prostheses are, the different types available, and how to choose and look after a prosthesis. It also explains how to get a new prosthesis and how to get a replacement.

WHAT IS A BREAST PROSTHESIS?

A breast prosthesis is an artificial breast form that fits in a bra cup to replace your natural breast. It is most often used after surgery for breast cancer, either after a mastectomy (removal of the breast) or a wide local excision (removal of a lump and some surrounding tissue). A well fitting prosthesis can help your posture and give you a more natural shape.

Permanent breast prostheses are made from silicone gel moulded to form the natural shape of a woman's breast, sometimes including the nipple outline. The surface feels soft and smooth. The underside of a prosthesis is more variable. It can be firm and smooth or may have ridges that are soft and flexible.

A breast prosthesis may feel cold at first but it warms up quickly with body contact. It may also seem heavy, but the sense of weight disappears once it is held against your chest wall and supported by your bra.

Initially, you will be fitted with a temporary breast prosthesis which is a lightweight fibre filled shape. This is used for the first 6 to 8 weeks post surgery as the body requires time to heal and may be tender and sore.

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ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROSTHESES?

There is a wide range of prostheses available in different shapes, sizes and skin colours. They are made from materials that resemble the movement, feel and weight of normal breast tissue. A properly weighted form provides the balance your body needs for correct posture. You should be able to find a prosthesis to suit your particular needs. The most common type of prosthesis rests against your chest wall and is held in place by your bra, although there are a number of different types to choose from.

Partial prostheses

If you have had a wide local excision you may not have lost much breast tissue but it may be enough to make your breast shape different. This will depend on the size of your breast and where the lump was, and will affect the type of prosthesis you need. You may need a 'shell' type prosthesis which is hollow and fits over your remaining breast tissue, restoring your breast to its original shape. Or you may need a small, wedge-shaped prosthesis to fill out the bottom, top or side of your bra.

Lightweight prostheses

Most prostheses are made to weigh the same as your normal breast, although some women find that these still feel too heavy. You may prefer to wear a lightweight prosthesis.

These are also made of silicone but they weigh less than standard prostheses.

Self-supporting prostheses

Self-supporting prostheses may suit some women, particularly those who are very active. These prostheses stick directly to your skin by using adhesive strips that stick to the back of the prosthesis. They may feel more natural and secure than other types which simply fit into a bra cup. However, these prostheses still need the support of a well fitting bra and are suitable for wear six months post surgery.

Prosthetic nipples

Prosthetic nipples are artificial nipples in different sizes and skin colours that you can stick on to your breast prosthesis or after breast reconstruction where there is no nipple.

CAN I WEAR A PROsthesis STRAIGHT AFTER SURGERY?

Yes you can. A temporary prosthesis is lightweight and fibre-filled and can be worn immediately following surgery. Whatever type of surgery you have had you will not be able to wear anything that puts pressure on your scar and the surrounding area for six to eight weeks. When the scar has fully healed you may need to have further treatment such as radiotherapy, which can make the skin tender and

sensitive for a while. You may not be able to wear a silicone prosthesis until this sensitivity has gone completely.

While your scar is healing you can use a lightweight temporary prosthesis made of synthetic washable fibre inside a cotton cover. Your breast care nurse will provide this for you in the hospital. This well shaped temporary fabric form will help maintain your outward appearance during the initial period after your operation.

Some women find that a bra is too constricting during this time. If you prefer, you can wear a camisole top or a cotton vest with Lycra to give you support.

You might decide to carry on using these prostheses for leisurewear or at night.

HOW DO I CHOOSE A PROsthesis?

To help you choose the right prosthesis you need to be seen by a breast care nurse or a trained fitter. You also need plenty of time and privacy. You might find it helpful to look at some breast prostheses so that you have an idea of what to expect, perhaps even before your operation. Your breast care nurse can show you some samples of different prostheses. If you would like to find out about the full range available, you can request catalogues from the suppliers listed at the



end of this factsheet. For more information, call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 30 90 40.

Who does the fitting?

The breast care nurse or a trained mastectomy fitter will do the fitting for you. An appointment may be made for you before you leave hospital. If not, she will provide you with contact details for qualified fitters in your area. You can also call the National Breast Cancer Helpline on Freefone 1800 30 90 40 for further information. If not the nurse will provide you with details of qualified fitters in your area.

CHOOSING A BRA

To make sure your prosthesis is comfortable and fits well you need to have a well fitting bra. Even if you think you know your bra size it is best to see a trained bra fitter. Most lingerie shops and department stores have trained fitters. Some fitters have had special training to fit women who have had breast surgery so it's worth enquiring if this service is available.

You need to choose a bra that fits close to your chest wall between the cups, with enough depth of material between the cups to cover the prosthesis. You should be able to find suitable bras in any lingerie shop or department store.

Although the best result is usually obtained with a normal, well fitting bra, some women may feel more secure with a mastectomy bra, which has a

pocket in the cup to hold the prosthesis. You can buy mastectomy bras in many lingerie shops and department stores. You can also adapt an ordinary bra by sewing in a pocket. You will find a list of suppliers of mastectomy bras at the back of this factsheet.

At the fitting

When you get fitted for your prosthesis it is a good idea to wear or take with you a plain, light-coloured T-shirt or close fitting top. This means that you can be sure you choose a prosthesis that gives you a smooth outline. You may also want to take a favourite bra or a low-necked dress that you would still like to wear. You may want to take a friend or partner along for support and to give their opinion.

HOW DO I LOOK AFTER MY PROSTHESIS?

It is important to look after your prosthesis carefully and follow the care instructions that come with it.

Most prostheses should be washed every day with warm soapy water and patted dry with a towel.

Always keep your prosthesis in its box when you are not wearing it so that it doesn't get damaged.

Prostheses are generally guaranteed for two years, as long as the care instructions have been followed, but often last longer.

DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR MY PROSTHESIS?

All women who have had breast cancer surgery are entitled to their initial prosthesis and two bras free of charge. Your breast care nurse will arrange a prosthesis fitting a few weeks after surgery.

HOW DO I GET A REPLACEMENT PROSTHESIS?

Medical card holders

If you need a replacement prosthesis, talk to your breast care nurse, or GP if you are no longer attending hospital. Your prosthesis can be replaced when it shows signs of wear, damage, or when you gain or lose a lot of weight

If you have a medical card, you are entitled to two bras every year and a breast prosthesis every two years, if required. In order to avail of this, you need to get a prescription from your local GP. Bring this prescription to your local health centre where it will be processed. You will then be sent an official order form. This can be used in some hospitals or retail suppliers. It is best to telephone first to find out the local procedure.



Private patients

Private patients can buy replacement prostheses from some retail shops or mail order suppliers. Some insurance policies will reimburse you

for your prostheses, bras and swimwear every year but you must have spent over your minimum requirement to make an outpatient claim. Others will cover a percentage of your prostheses costs. You need to check your insurance policy to see what is covered and how you must submit claims.

All necessary medical purchases can be claimed against tax.

COPING WITH BREAST SURGERY

Most women who are treated for breast cancer have some form of surgery. Regardless of your age or personal circumstances, it is understandable to have concerns about how you will cope with losing a breast. Whether this loss is partial or

complete, any change to your body image can be a traumatic event. Many women who have been through this experience describe it as a kind of bereavement. If you have a partner or children you may have concerns about their reactions to your operation and to you wearing a prosthesis. You may worry that it is going to change the way they feel about you.

Recovering emotionally from breast surgery can take some time. Each person's response is different so don't worry too much if you feel you are not coping as well as someone else you know in a similar situation. If you are struggling or feeling isolated remember that there are people who can help you. Tell your family and friends how you feel so they can support you. You might want to talk to your breast care nurse.

You might find it easier to share your feelings with someone who has had a similar experience to you. Reach to Recovery is a programme set up

to help and support women who have recently had a breast cancer diagnosis. The programme works on the principle of personal contact between the patient and a Reach to Recovery volunteer - a woman who has had surgery for breast cancer. Carefully selected and fully trained volunteers are available to provide advice and reassurance at a time when a woman is most in need of both. For more information on individual support or support groups in your area, call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 30 90 40.

HELP FROM ACTION BREAST CANCER

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, provides breast cancer information and support, and funds breast cancer research. Our services are free, confidential and accessible.

For more information call the National Breast Cancer Helpline Freefone 1800 30 90 40 or visit www.cancer.ie/action



STANDARDS OF CARE

Action Breast Cancer has produced these Standards of Care for breast prosthesis and bra fitting services following the national research which investigated the provision, fitting, supply and use of external breast prostheses in Ireland. In doing so it involved asking women with breast cancer about this aspect of their care, as well as breast care nurses and prosthesis and bra fitters.

These Standards of Care will give women an understanding of what to look for from prosthesis and bra fitting service, and useful guidelines for those providing the service.

Action Breast Cancer commissioned this research and it was conducted in conjunction with the School of Nursing in Dublin City University with funding received from the Health Research Board as part of the Building Partnerships for a Healthier Society Research Award Scheme

Standards of care for breast prosthesis fitting services

1. A fitting service should encourage women to make contact with the service and put her at ease. Everything possible should be done to ensure the best possible fitting experience.
2. The fitter should be trained, knowledgeable and sensitive to women's needs. A woman should have a choice of seeing a female fitter.
3. The fitting environment should be easily accessible and spacious with good lighting and ventilation. A range of products should be on display and the room should have fitting rooms for privacy and a full-length mirror.
4. Women are entitled to a prompt appointment. Adequate time should be made available for the fitting and for women to receive appropriate emotional support.
5. Women are entitled to see and try a range of products so that they can choose the best product to meet their individual needs.
6. Women should always be measured for a breast prosthesis and/or mastectomy bra. If it is appropriate for a woman to be measured without removing her bra, this option should be offered to her.
7. Chosen products should be made available to women in a timely fashion. If there is a delay, women are entitled to know the reason for the delay and how long they have to wait.
8. Women should be carefully informed about how to care for their prosthesis according to the manufacturer's instructions.
9. Women should receive impartial information about alternative products and ranges available from other sources. Brochures from a variety of ranges should be made available to all women.
10. An information leaflet outlining what to expect at the prosthesis fitting should be made available to all women, as well as clear guidelines on entitlements and the replacement of prostheses and mastectomy bras



SUPPLIERS

Contact individual suppliers for full details of their product ranges.

CARLOW

Marie Sue Lingerie
Burrin Street, Carlow

Telephone: 059 91 39639

Prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear available. Medical cards accepted.

CLARE

Rochfords Pharmacy
21 Parnell Street
Ennis, Co. Clare

Telephone: 065 6820099
Fax: 065 6844650

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Fitting service available by appointment. Medical cards accepted.

CORK

Trulife
Kilbarry Business Park, Cork

Telephone: 021 465 4012

Fax: 021 430 0020

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Fitting service available by appointment.

Marks & Spencer
Cork

Telephone: 021 427 5555

Fitting service available for bras from their range which are suitable to wear with a prosthesis. Swimwear available in store on request.

DONEGAL

Mc Elhinneys
Main Street, Ballybofey
Co. Donegal

Telephone: 074 913 1217

Mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock.

DUBLIN

Almacare Ltd.
Unit 11, Kinsealy Business Park
Kinsealy Lane, Malahide
Co. Dublin

Telephone: 01 524 0413

Fax: 01 443 0640

Email: almacare@iol.ie

Web: www.almacare.ie

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. A fitting service is available by appointment. Fitting clinics are held in Galway, Sligo, Drogheda, Navan and in Dublin at Beaumont Hospital and in Dublin 14. Medical cards accepted.

Trulife (formerly Barrmed)
Cookstown Industrial Estate
Tallaght
Dublin 24

Telephone: 01 451 1755

Fax: 01 452 5790

Web: www.barrmed.ie

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Fitting service available by appointment. Clinic in Drogheda throughout the year – contact the Dublin office for details. Medical cards accepted.

O'Haras Pharmacy
16 Redmonds Hill
Aungier Street
Dublin 2

Telephone: 01 476 0680

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Fitting service available on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Appointment necessary. Medical cards accepted. Clinics also in Sligo, contact 071 914 2896 and Middleton, contact 021 463 1092.

Murray's Medical Equipment
20–21 Talbot St
Dublin 1

Telephone: 01 855 5733

A range of prostheses, and mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. A fitting service is available by appointment. Medical cards accepted.

ARNOTT'S

12 Henry St, Dublin 1
Telephone: 01 805 0400

Fitting service available for mastectomy bras and swimwear.

Marks & Spencer

Mary Street
Grafton Street
Dundrum Town Centre
Blanchardstown Shopping Centre
Liffey Valley Shopping Centre

Telephone: 01 872 8833

Fitting service available for bras from their range which are suitable to wear with a prosthesis. Swimwear available in store on request.

GALWAY

Ryans of Galway
Shop Street, Galway

Telephone: 091 567061

Fitting service available for mastectomy bras and swimwear.

University Pharmacy
University Halls, Newcastle Road
Galway

Telephone: 091 520115

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Fitting service available by appointment. Medical cards accepted.

Tuam Cancer Care Support & Information Centre

30 Temple Jarlath Court,
Tuam, Co. Galway

Telephone: 093 28522

Email: tccg@eircom.net

Web:

www.tuamcancercaregroup.ie

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

Dr. Zita Fitzpatrick

The Post-Mastectomy
Care Clinic, Cloghscoltia, Barna
Co Galway

Telephone/Fax: 091 592 515

Mobile: 086 262 4385

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear available. Fitting service available by appointment. Hospital visits can be arranged. Medical cards accepted.

**KILKENNY**

W.H. Good
Kilkenny

Telephone: 056 7722143

Prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. Sew-in-pocket service also available. Medical cards accepted.

LAOIS

The Cúisle Centre
Block Road, Portlaoise
Co. Laois

Email: cuislecentre@eircom.net
Web: www.cuislecentre.com

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

LOUTH

Gary Kelly Cancer Support Centre
Georges Street, Drogheda,
Co. Louth.

Telephone: 041 980 5100
Email: info@gkcancersupport.com
Web: www.gkcancersupport.com

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

LIMERICK

Bravelle
1 The Glen, Ballyneaty
Limerick

Telephone: 061 351886
Mobile: 087 9397899
Fax: 061 351886
Web: www.bravelleshop.com

A range of prostheses, mastectomy bras and swimwear in stock. A fitting service is available by appointment. Medical cards accepted.

LONGFORD

Bijou Lingerie
14 Dublin Street, Longford

Telephone: 043 42944

Mastectomy bras and swimwear available.

MAYO

La Belle Famme
Chaple Lane,
Claremorris, Co. Mayo

Telephone: 094 937 3652

Prostheses and mastectomy bras available. Fitting service available. Medical cards accepted.

Cara Iorrais Cancer Support Centre, 2 Church Street,
Belmullet, Co. Mayo.

Telephone: 097 20590
Email: caraiorrais@gmail.com

This cancer support centre organises an annual fitting day. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

Mayo Cancer Support Association

Rock Rose House,
32 St Patrick's Avenue,
Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

Telephone: 094 903 8407
Email: mayocancersupport@eircom.net
Web: www.mayocancer.ie

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

MONAGHAN

Suzanne Michaels Lingerie
51 Dublin St
Monaghan

Telephone: 047 81377

Stocks prosthesis and bras. Appointment required for fitting

SLIGO

Sligo Cancer Support
2A Wine Street, Sligo

Telephone: 071 917 0399,
Email: scsc@eircom.net
Web: sligocancersupportcentre.ie

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

WESTMEATH

LARCC (Cancer Support Centre)
Ballinalack, Mullingar, Co.
Westmeath.

Ph: 1850 719 719
E-mail info@larcc.ie
Web: www.larcc.ie

This cancer support centre organises fitting days regularly. For more information, please contact by telephone, e-mail or website.

WATERFORD

Nursing Needs
13 Gladstone Street
Waterford

Telephone: 051 874622
Web: www.nursingneeds.ie

A range of prostheses, bras and swimwear in stock. Prosthesis fitting available by appointment only. Medical cards accepted.



MAIL ORDER OR ONLINE ORDERING

Amoena (UK) Ltd

1 Eagle Close, Chandlers Ford
Eastleigh, Hampshire SO53 4NF
England

Telephone: 0044 2380 270 345
Web: www.amoena.co.uk

Eloise Lingerie (UK)

PO Box 70
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk IP30 0JT
England

Telephone: 0044 1284 828 787
Web: www.eloise.co.uk

Nicola Jane (UK)

2 Dukes Court, Bognor Road
Chichester PO19 2FX
England

Telephone: 0044 1243 790 900
Web: www.nicolajane.com

Trulife Limited

3 Cookstown Industrial Estate
Tallaght
Dublin 24

Telephone: 01 451 1755
Fax: 01 452 5790
Email: info@trulife.ie
Web: www.trulife.ie

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Irish Cancer Society

43-45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4.

Helpline Freefone:
1 800 200 700
Email: helpline@irishcancer.ie
Web: www.cancer.ie

Reach to Recovery

43-45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4

Helpline Freefone:
1800 30 90 40

Irish Lymphoedema Support Network

Irish Cancer Society
43-45 Northumberland Road
Dublin 4

Helpline Freefone:
1800 30 90 40

VHI Healthcare

IDA Business Park
Dublin Road
Kilkenny

Callsave: 1850 44 44 44
Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm,
Saturday 9am to 3pm
Website: www.vhi.ie

QUINN-healthcare

Mill Island, Fermoy, Co. Cork,
Lo Call: 1890 89 1890

Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm,
Saturday 10am to 3.30pm
Website:
www.quinn-healthcare.com

Hibernian Aviva Health

Postal Address:

PO Box 764, Togher, Co. Cork
Head Office:

Hibernian Aviva Health
One Park Place, Hatch Street
Dublin 2
CallSave: 1850 717 717
Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm
Website: www.hibernian.ie

Europa Donna Ireland

PO Box 6602, Dublin 8

Email: edi@iol.ie
Telephone: 01 496 0198
Web: www.europadonna.ie

USEFUL WEBSITES

Irish Cancer Society

www.cancer.ie

Breast Cancer Care UK

www.breastcancercare.org.uk

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

The Susan G. Komen Foundation

www.komen.org

Cancerbacup

www.cancerbacup.org.uk

Europa Donna

www.europadonna.net/ireland

ABC – ACTION BREAST CANCER

Action Breast Cancer, a programme of the Irish Cancer Society, is the leading provider of breast cancer information and support in Ireland. Each year we reach over 25,000 women who are concerned about breast cancer or breast health. Our services are free and include:

- **National Breast Cancer Helpline** 1800 30 90 40 – staffed by specialist cancer nurses.
- **Patient care programmes** – providing emotional support and practical assistance for those living with breast cancer.
- **Health Promotion** – providing community and workplace programmes on breast awareness and leading a healthy lifestyle.
- **Advocacy** – providing a voice for those affected by breast cancer in Ireland.
- **Professional support** – complementing the services offered by those caring for breast cancer patients.
- **Research** – funding vital Irish research that will have a significant impact on the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

ABC is funded entirely by donations from the public. If you would like to support our work or make a donation please contact us.

action
breast
cancer

a programme of
irish cancer society

Freefone Helpline

1800 30 90 40

Published by the Irish Cancer Society © 2007
Updated June 2009 Review Date 2011
ICAN58367

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