



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## MASTECTOMY AND LUMPECTOMY: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

While surgery is not a recommended treatment option for everyone coping with breast cancer, it may be an option for you. There are two main types of surgery for people diagnosed with breast cancer: mastectomy and lumpectomy. A mastectomy removes the entire breast containing the tumor and has several types (total, radical and partial). A lumpectomy removes only the tumor itself with some surrounding breast tissue. No matter which surgery your health care team recommends, it is important to understand your options and ask questions.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE SURGERY

If mastectomy or lumpectomy is a treatment option for you, here is a list of questions you may want to ask your health care team beforehand. As always, it can be helpful to bring your list of questions to your medical appointments and write down the doctor's responses.

#### **What type of surgery do I need?**

When your health care team recommends a treatment, make sure you understand why. Ask questions about anything you don't understand.

**How long will recovery take? Will surgery limit my arm use?** After lumpectomy or mastectomy surgery, regular activities such as dressing or bathing can be difficult. Talk to your health care team about the challenges you may face after surgery.



**How soon can I wear a bra after surgery?** Surgery may cause skin to be sensitive. Talk to your health care team about the type of bra you can wear after surgery and when.

#### **What is lymphedema and is this something I should be aware of?**

Lymphedema is a possible treatment side effect after lymph nodes are removed during breast surgery; it is a painful swelling in the arm that occurs when the body's lymphatic fluid fails to circulate properly and builds up in the soft tissue instead. There are several ways to manage lymphedema. Your doctor or nurse can give you tips to prevent and reduce the swelling. For more information on lymphedema, read CancerCare's 'Coping With Lymphedema' fact sheet.

#### **Will I need radiation after surgery?**

Many individuals receive radiation after lumpectomy surgery. Speak to your health care team about whether this is a recommended treatment for you.

#### **What side effects might I experience after surgery?**

Keep in mind that side effects may vary from person to person, and can be treated by your health care team. A key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise.

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Report them right away—don't wait for your next appointment. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of breast cancer treatment.

**Should I consider breast reconstruction or a prosthetic?** Breast reconstruction and prostheses help many women redefine their feelings about the loss of a breast. Reconstructive surgery can rebuild your breast so it is about the same size and shape as it was before. Prostheses are man-made substitutes that can replace a part of the body and can help individuals feel and look more comfortable. A prosthetic can give a look of symmetry; many of the newer prostheses are made of a lighter-weight material and come in special forms that can be used in swimwear and night gowns. For more information on prostheses, read CancerCare's 'Prostheses Resources' fact sheet. As always, consult with your health care team about which options are best for you.

## GET SUPPORT

Surgery may leave you feeling exhausted and self-conscious about your body. Talking about your emotions may be hard, but it can also comfort you and the people who care about you.

**Join a support group.** Connecting with others who understand and relate to your experience can help you feel supported and less alone. CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

**Reach out to family and friends.** Confiding in someone you trust can help you feel more in control.

**Talk to a counselor or oncology social worker.** CancerCare's professional oncology social workers understand the complex issues that can arise for someone living with breast cancer. Speaking one on one with an oncology social worker can help you develop strategies for coping with some of the more complex emotions and concerns you may be facing. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).



## CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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