WATERFRONT
PRIVATE HOSPITAL

PATIENT INFORMATION · AFTERCARE

Breast Reduction Aftercare

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

Typical recovery: 6–8 weeks for full recovery · Reviewed 4 July 2026 · Version 1.0

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.

- Chest pain or trouble breathing
- Heavy bleeding that won't stop
- Signs of blood clot (leg swelling, 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
- Temperature over 38°C with other symptoms

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 Reduction — Patient Leaflet (https://waterfront-patient-portal.netlify.app/waterfrontaftercare/breast_reduction_patient_leaflet.pdf)

How to Use This Information

The advice below is based on Waterfront Private Hospital's written breast reduction aftercare leaflet. 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

- Collected all medications (painkillers, antibiotics if prescribed)
- Your surgical bra fitted comfortably
- Follow-up appointment card
- Transport arranged
- Someone staying with you tonight
- Our contact numbers saved in your phone
- Understood your medication instructions

Wound Care

- You can shower from day 1
- Pat dressings dry gently
- Don't worry if outer dressings come loose

- After first week, nurse removes outer dressings at appointment
- Paper tape stays on wounds
- At week 2, remove paper tape by end of week (use Vaseline if stuck)
- Watch for signs of infection: increasing redness, warmth, swelling, discharge, or fever

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 painkillers regularly in the first few days – do not wait until pain is severe
- Dihydrocodeine: only if regular painkillers aren't enough
- Some discomfort, tightness and swelling is expected
- Swelling and bruising typically peak at 48–72 hours then gradually improve
- A supportive / soft bra can help reduce discomfort during the first few weeks

Activity Restrictions

- Driving: 1 week (only if off strong painkillers)
- Office work: 1–2 weeks
- Physical work: 2–3 weeks (start gradually)
- Short flights (<3 hours): 1–2 weeks (wear compression socks)
- Long flights (>3 hours): 3 weeks (move around hourly)
- Gentle exercise: 4 weeks (wear support bra)
- Full exercise: 6 weeks (build up slowly)
- Swimming: 6 weeks (when wounds fully healed)
- Underwired bras: 3 months (check with nurse first)
- No heavy lifting for 6 weeks
- No smoking (delays healing)
- Avoid alcohol for 3 weeks
- Direct sun on scars: avoid for 1 year

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.

- **Surgical bra:** Your surgical bra will be fitted comfortably before you leave. Ensure you have it on properly and understand how to wear it.
- **Follow-up appointments:** You will be given a card with details of your first dressing clinic / follow-up appointment (usually week 1) and contact details for the ward if you have any concerns once you get home.
- **Getting home safely:** You must have someone to take you home and a **responsible adult with you for the first night**.

Your Surgical Support Bra

A well-fitting surgical bra made of soft, seamless fabric is essential during your recovery.

As a guide: wear it day and night for the first 3 months, then during the day up to about 6 months. These are typical timings rather than strict rules — your team will tailor them to you.

Bra Requirements:

- No underwiring
- Front opening (not over head)
- Adjustable straps
- Soft, seamless fabric
- Correct band size (28, 30, 32, 34, 36, etc.)
- **Where to buy:** High street: M&S, Tesco, ASDA. 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).

Activity Timeline - When to Resume Normal Life

- **Week 1:** Driving (if off strong painkillers)
- **1-2 Weeks:** Office work; Short flights (<3 hours) with compression socks
- **2-3 Weeks:** Physical work (start gradually)
- **3 Weeks:** Long flights (>3 hours, move hourly)
- **4 Weeks:** Gentle exercise (wear support bra)
- **6 Weeks:** Full exercise (build up slowly); Swimming (wounds fully healed)
- **3 Months:** Underwired bras (check with nurse first)

Medication Information

Regular Pain Relief

Strong Pain Relief (if prescribed)

Dihydrocodeine: Only if regular painkillers aren't enough

Other Medications

- **Antibiotics:** Complete the full course if prescribed
- **Laxatives:** Use if constipated from painkillers

Scar Care

When to Start: Begin at 4 weeks if wounds are fully healed

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)
- **Products to Use — Moisturiser:** Aveeno, E45, or Bio-Oil
- **Scar Timeline — 3 months:** Scars still pink/red
- **Scar Timeline — 6 months:** Fading to lighter colour
- **Scar Timeline — 1 year:** Final appearance

Lifestyle Guidelines

✓ **DO**

- ✓ Walk regularly
- ✓ Eat healthy foods
- ✓ Drink plenty of water
- ✓ Sleep well
- ✓ Take medications as directed
- ✓ Attend all appointments
- ✗ **AVOID**

- ✗ Smoking (delays healing)
- ✗ Alcohol for 3 weeks
- ✗ Heavy lifting for 6 weeks
- ✗ Underwired bras for 3 months
- ✗ Swimming until wounds healed
- ✗ Direct sun on scars for 1 year

Your Recovery, Stage by Stage

Days 1–3 — Early Recovery

Immediate post-surgery care and monitoring

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Breast pain and tightness
- Swelling and bruising
- Feeling tired
- Small blood spots on dressings
- Mood changes

CARE ROUTINE

- Take painkillers regularly (don't wait for pain)
- Rest but walk around your home every few hours
- Sleep in any comfortable position
- Keep your surgical bra on
- Shower carefully - it's OK if dressings get damp
- Pat dressings dry gently
- Don't worry if outer dressings come loose

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

- Pain reducing

- Swelling starting to go down
- Feeling more like yourself

CARE ROUTINE

- Continue painkillers only if needed
- Increase gentle walking
- Can consider driving if not on strong painkillers
- Attend first follow-up appointment (usually day 7)
- Nurse removes outer dressings
- Paper tape stays on wounds

COMFORT

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

Week 2 — Progressive Healing

Continued recovery with increased function

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Feeling better, less tight
- Noticeable reduction in swelling
- Bruising fading to yellow/green
- Feeling much more like yourself

CARE ROUTINE

- Remove paper tape by end of week (use Vaseline if stuck)
- Return to work if job isn't physical
- Most patients stop painkillers
- Continue gentle activities
- Light household tasks (no heavy lifting)

COMFORT

- Minimal pain medication needed
- Most patients stop painkillers
- Occasional discomfort with certain movements

Weeks 3–4 — Most Swelling Gone

Significant improvement in healing

WHAT'S NORMAL

- 80-90% of swelling gone
- May feel shooting pains (nerves healing - this is normal)
- Significant improvement in appearance
- Feeling confident with results

CARE ROUTINE

- Start moisturising scars if wounds are dry
- 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
- May have occasional shooting pains from nerve healing
- Full range of motion restored

Weeks 4–6 — Return to Normal

Resuming most daily and exercise activities

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Almost normal appearance
- Most swelling resolved
- Scars significantly faded
- Feeling completely normal
- Full range of motion

CARE ROUTINE

- Can wear normal supportive bras (avoid underwire for now)
- Full exercise with surgeon approval
- Continue sun protection on scars
- Regular scar care routine
- Follow-up appointment around week 6

COMFORT

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

Month 3 — Final Settling

Long-term healing and final results

WHAT'S NORMAL

- Scars well-healed and faded
- Can try underwired bras (get professionally fitted first)
- Final shape apparent
- Complete return to all activities

CARE ROUTINE

- After 3 months you can try underwired bras (get professionally fitted first)
- Get professionally fitted first
- 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 (Day 7) — Nurse removes outer dressings. Checks your healing. Answers your questions. Paper tape stays on wounds.

- Wound inspection
- Dressing removal
- Healing assessment
- Review of care instructions

Further nurse reviews — as needed — You are likely to have further nurse reviews — wound healing after this procedure often benefits from more than one visit. 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

When will my breasts look normal?

Most swelling goes by 4 weeks. Final shape takes 6 months. They may drop slightly - this is normal.

Why does one breast hurt more?

It's common for breasts to heal at different rates. If one is much more swollen, contact us.

Can I sleep on my side?

Yes, sleep however is comfortable. Your surgical bra provides support in any position.

When can I buy normal bras?

After 3 months you can try underwired bras — get professionally fitted first, as your size will have changed.

Why do I have shooting pains?

This means nerves are healing. It's normal and will improve over several months.

What if paper tape won't come off?

Soak with Vaseline for 30 minutes, then gently peel off. Never force it.