

# Your Guide to: Bras and Breast Prostheses After Breast Surgery

**For patients who are having or have had one or more of these surgeries (without breast drains put in):**

- **Lumpectomy**
- **Sentinel lymph node biopsy**

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. Before you buy a bra or breast prosthesis after breast surgery, talk to your nurse, doctor or another member of your health care team. They can answer any questions or concerns you may have.



## About Your Surgery

### **What should I expect after breast surgery?**

Your need for bras and breast prostheses (breast-shaped material that is worn inside a bra to look like the natural shape of a breast) can change before and after surgery. This is because your body can change after surgery, and the bras you used before may not fit.

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

You will go through 2 main phases of recovery after breast surgery:

**Phase 1: Day of surgery to 2 weeks after your surgery.**

During this time you will need to wear special bras to help you heal from surgery.

**Phase 2: Starting 2 weeks after your surgery.**

During this time, you can go back to your old bras or get fitted for a new bra in the style of your choice.

## Phase 1: Day of Surgery to 2 Weeks After Surgery

### What should I wear right after breast surgery?

If you choose to wear a bra, consider wearing bras without underwire for the first 2 weeks after surgery. Most people find this comfortable.

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

- a supportive bra that is not too tight, without an underwire such as a sports bra
- a bra 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”.

Below are a few examples of what you can wear after surgery.

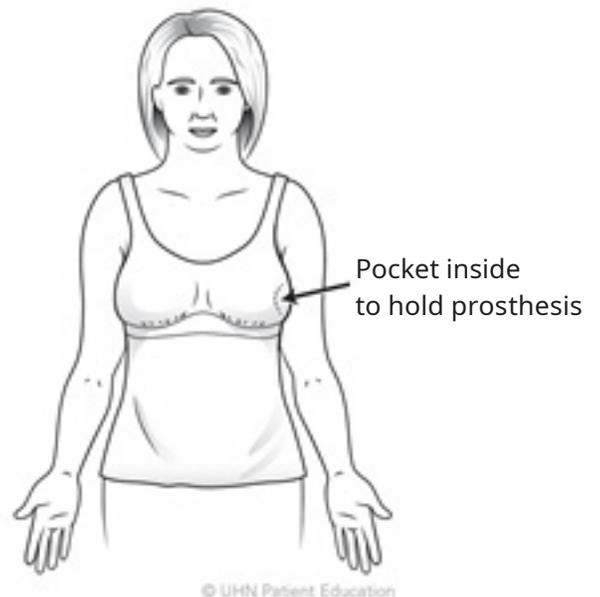
Sports bra with zipper



Sports bra with hooks



Sleepwear



Read the pamphlet called “Know where to buy bras and breast prostheses after breast surgery” to know where to buy a special post-surgical bra. 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 “Know Where to Buy Bras and Breast Prostheses After Breast Surgery” online:

[https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health\\_Information/Health\\_Topics/Documents/Know\\_where\\_to\\_buy\\_bras\\_after\\_breast\\_surgery.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Know_where_to_buy_bras_after_breast_surgery.pdf)

## Phase 2: Starting 2 Weeks After Surgery

Your breast(s) will likely feel swollen and tender after your surgery. As a result, you should wait 2 weeks to recover enough before seeing if you choose to get fitted for a new bra.

When you are ready to get fitted for a new bra:

- A bra-fitter trained in making mastectomy and lumpectomy clothes can help you find the right bra for you.
- A bra-fitter can give you advice on choosing a bra that fits well and offers you comfort.
- Your bra should be fitted for the larger breast.

## 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. Some patients may want to use a nipple prosthesis too, if their nipple was changed or removed during breast surgery.

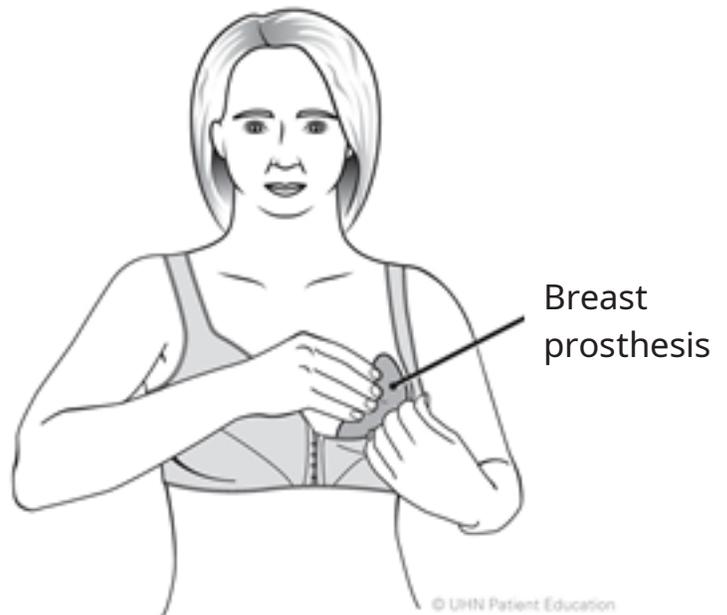
Breast prostheses are easy to wear. They can be worn:

- 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 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.

## **What is a partial breast prosthesis?**

During a lumpectomy, only a small amount of breast tissue may be removed. In most cases, the change in breast size is not easy for others to notice. Sometimes, a large amount of breast tissue is removed and it leaves the breast looking smaller.

If your breasts are different sizes after a lumpectomy, then:

- You may need only a partial breast prosthesis (a prosthesis smaller than a full breast and made to fill the shape of the missing breast tissue).
- The makers of breast prostheses make a wide range of ready-made, partial prostheses called “shapers”. Shapers help replace the missing breast tissue removed during surgery.
- Shapers will likely be made of foam, fiberfill or silicone.
- A breast care specialist (someone trained to know about the different breast prostheses and bras for after breast surgery) can help you choose the right prosthesis for you. Breast care specialists are sometimes called “breast prosthesis fitters” or “mastectomy fitters”.

If there is only a small difference in the size of your breasts:

- A silicone gel pad or foam insert may be enough to make them look equal in size. You can get these products at lingerie stores. You can wear a stretchy bra to help keep the foam or gel pad in place.

There are choices in the type of bra and breast prosthesis you can use after breast surgery. Take the time to think about all of your options so you can find products you are happy with.

## **Why should I wear a breast prosthesis?**

Choosing to wear a breast prosthesis is a personal choice. Some people may want to look the same when wearing clothes from before their surgery.

For many, a breast prosthesis that fits well can:

- give them physical comfort
- give them self-confidence in their body image
- help restore their appearance to how they appeared before surgery

Breast prostheses are a good long-term option for when your chest has healed from breast surgery.

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

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

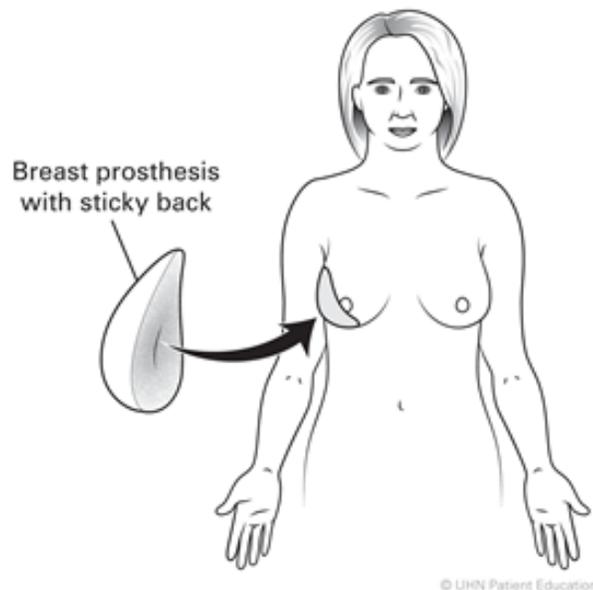
## **What are my options for breast prostheses?**

If you choose to wear a 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 breast prostheses.

## Ready-made (store bought) breast prostheses



## Custom-made (made just for you) breast prostheses

If you had lumpectomy, a custom-made breast prosthesis may be an option for you. They are 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 use low cut bras and have cleavage showing.

## 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 bra(s), breast prostheses, and swimwear to use after breast surgery.
- If you have concerns about money and buying bras or breast prostheses, ask a member of your health care team to talk to a hospital social worker. A social worker can 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.

## Where can I get ready-made or custom breast prostheses?

There are many manufacturers of breast forms and each store may carry different brands of breast prostheses. Read the pamphlet on “Know Where to Buy Bras and Breast Prostheses After Breast Surgery” ([https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health\\_Information/Health\\_Topics/Documents/Know\\_where\\_to\\_buy\\_bras\\_after\\_breast\\_surgery.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Know_where_to_buy_bras_after_breast_surgery.pdf)) for a list of stores where you could buy different brands and types of prostheses.

**Important:** Non-silicone breast prostheses cannot be bought with the breast prosthesis grant from the Ministry of Health’s Assistive Devices Program (ADP).

The development of patient education resources is supported by the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation.



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