Breast Cancer Surgery
and Pain

For patients who have had breast surgery

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

• Pain after surgery
• What you need to know about pain
• What you need to know about pain medication
• What are the side effects of pain medication
• Pain medication and shoulder exercises
• Other ways to control pain
Pain after surgery

Most people feel some pain or discomfort after surgery. As your body heals, your pain should get better. Pain can be distressing. It can get in the way of many things that help people get better, such as staying active.

Pain medication is prescribed to control pain as the body heals. Taking your pain medication to manage your pain now may help prevent you from developing chronic pain.

Although you may have days with more or less pain, if your pain is not slowly getting better over time, talk to a member of your health care team.

Some people will develop pain that doesn’t go away. There are treatments that can help this problem.

What you need to know about pain

Some pain after surgery is normal.

It is normal to have some pain or discomfort after surgery, but it is also normal to have your pain well controlled.

Moving will help you recover faster.

Movement after surgery prevents problems. Pain that stops you from moving will slow down your recovery. Slowly begin your normal activities. This will help you recover more quickly.

You do not have to live with pain

Trying to live with pain puts you at risk for injury because you try to protect the painful area using other muscles. This can cause over use injury or stiffness in the area you are avoiding. Pain can also change your sleep, appetite, or the way you think.

Living with pain can change your mood and your ability to deal with changes in your life. For these reasons it is important to take medication if you are experiencing pain.
Treating your pain is part of treating your cancer. Some people think that if their doctor looks after their pain, the doctor will not give full attention to treating their cancer. The truth is that good pain control is an important part of good cancer treatment.

Taking strong pain medications does not mean you will become addicted to the medications. It is very rare for people to have a problem stopping or getting addicted to pain medication when taking it as prescribed for post-surgical pain. The truth is that addiction is a psychological problem of the mind, and occurs when people are taking pain medications for reasons other than pain management.

What you need to know about pain medication

• When using any pain medication, carefully follow the instructions.

• Take your pain medication regularly. It will work better. Some people need less medication when they take it regularly.

• Listen to your body, if you’re having a lot of pain, for example right after surgery, take a stronger medication. For mild pain try something less strong like Tylenol.

• Some people will experience some nerve or neuropathic pain. This can feel like pins and needles, burning, tingling or stabbing. Normal pain medication doesn’t help much with this. If it is very uncomfortable you can take Gabapentin, if prescribed or talk to your health care team.
After surgery, you will be prescribed one or more medications to manage your pain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of drug</th>
<th>Type of drug</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tylenol #3 (Tylenol and Codeine)</td>
<td>Opioid</td>
<td>Strong pain killers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percocet (Tylenol and Oxycodone)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hydromorphone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil, Mobicox or Celebrex</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory</td>
<td>Reduces pain from swelling. You can start these two days after surgery. You can buy this without a prescription at the pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tylenol (acetaminophen)</td>
<td>Analgesic</td>
<td>Mild painkillers. You can start right after surgery but not with other medication with Tylenol in them. You can buy this without a prescription at the pharmacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabapentin</td>
<td>Neuropathic, nerve pain medication</td>
<td>This medication helps with nerve pain. It needs to be taken around the clock, not as needed, to work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What are the side effects of pain medication

Side effects from medication are very common. If you feel sleepy or drowsy, have nausea or vomiting, or constipation from your medication these are common side effects but can be helped.

- Constipation (trouble having a poo) is normal with opioids. Increase your fluid and fibre intake to help. You may also need to take a stool softener (for example, Colace) or a laxative to help you have a poo after surgery. Talk to a pharmacist or your nurse.

- Nausea or vomiting can also happen. Take Gravol (anti-nausea medication) as needed to help. If this does not help or nausea or vomiting lasts more than a few days, contact your nurse.

Pain medication and shoulder exercises

Take pain medication 30 minutes before starting your shoulder exercises if you are finding it too painful to do without. This will reduce discomfort.

Other ways to control pain

While your body is healing from surgery, taking pain medication regularly is the best way to control your pain. Some people find that non-medication methods may give extra relief and comfort.

You can try:

- relaxation training
- meditation
- therapeutic touch
- gentle stretching
- support bras
Be Careful! Do not use hot or cold packs near the area you had surgery. The arm on the side of your surgery and the area around the wound have less feeling and using hot and cold could burn or damage the skin.

Who to call
If you are having pain that is not controlled or have any questions, speak with someone on your health care team.

University Health Network tries to keep patient education brochures up to date, but some information may change. Please contact any agencies or organizations that may be listed inside to make sure the information is correct or to find out more about their services.

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

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