

Patient information

If Breast Cancer Returns Signs and Symptoms Open Access Follow Up

Breast Services

It is important to know that survival rates for breast cancer are improving all the time and that modern breast cancer treatment is usually successful and recurrence is unusual.

There is no maximum time span as to when breast cancer can return but for most people the risk reduces over time.

However, breast cancer can sometimes return so it is important that you are aware of what to look for and what to do if you become concerned about anything.

Breast cancer can return:

- **In the treated breast area (local recurrence)**
- **In the area under your arm, above your collar bone or neck area (regional recurrence)**
- **In the other breast (rare)**
- **Elsewhere in the body (distant recurrence, also known as metastatic breast cancer or secondary breast cancer)**

Breast awareness

Being breast aware is an important part of caring for your body. It means getting to know how your breasts look and feel, so you can know what is normal for you. You can then feel more confident about noticing any unusual changes.

We know that after having treatment for breast cancer that it can take some time (up to two years) to become familiar with your treated breast. However, the better we know our bodies, the quicker we notice what is normal or not normal for us. If something feels not normal for you, please contact the breast care nurses.

There is no right or wrong way to get to know your breasts. Try to get used to the way your breasts look and feel.

You can do this around once a month, in the bath or shower, when using soap or body lotion. There is really no need to change your everyday routine.

You can find leaflets and websites which may be helpful. Your breast care nurse can recommend some to you if you wish.

You know better than anyone how your breasts look and feel normally, so if you notice a change, contact your breast care nurse.

Signs and symptoms

Everyone has aches and pains, but when you have had breast cancer, you may be more aware of them and may be concerned that any pain is related to cancer.

Included in this leaflet is a summary of symptoms that you may want to report either to your breast care nurse or your GP should they develop.

If you experience any of these symptoms, it does not necessarily mean that your cancer has returned as they can be caused by many other common conditions, but it may mean that you should get them checked out by the breast team. Please contact the breast care nurse for advice.

Getting a recurrence or a new cancer can be frightening, but it is important to remember that if breast cancer returns, it can be treated.

Summary of symptoms you may want to report

Please contact the breast care nurse if you notice:

- A lump or swelling in your breast, in the skin after a mastectomy, above your collar bone or in your neck, or under your arm.
- Any skin changes, red areas or raised spots on your breast or mastectomy scar.
- Nipple discharge.
- If you develop lymphoedema (arm swelling on the side of your cancer).

Or if you experience:

- Any new, ongoing pain in any part of your body, especially in your back or hips, that does not improve with painkillers and which is often worse at night.
- Pins and needles and/or a loss of sensation or weakness in your arms or legs.
- Unexplained weight loss and a loss of appetite.
- A constant feeling of nausea.
- Discomfort or swelling under your ribs or across your upper abdomen.
- A dry cough or a feeling of breathlessness.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

If you need clinical advice please or for appointment enquiries please contact the Open Access Coordinator

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