

# **The Breast Cancer Manual**

**Kevin P. Bethke, M.D.**

**Northwestern Memorial Hospital  
Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center**

Patient: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information and multimedia presentations go to my website:

**[www.drbethke.com](http://www.drbethke.com)**

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## ***Welcome:***

The fact that you're reading this manual indicates that you have a breast problem.

At the Lynn Sage Breast Center we realize how much anxiety this can cause and we will try our best to keep your evaluation and treatment "on track". I like to tell patients that they have a project ahead of them and that they need to act as the project manager, i.e. stay involved, take notes, ask questions and feel empowered. This "Manual" is designed to facilitate your empowerment. You'll want to feel like you're in control of your cancer and not vice-versa.

I've included a number of forms, worksheets and web links designed to help you understand the overall process, expedite your consultations and facilitate decision-making. It is important to remember that breast cancer is **NOT** a medical emergency despite what family and friends may say, but we do understand that it can feel like an emotional emergency. At times you will feel like the preoperative evaluation is taking forever. You have time to do it right-it is in your best interest to gather as much information as possible prior to our making a final recommendation so that the best decisions are made.

## **Appointments:**

I see patients in the Lynn Sage Breast Center on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Prentice Women's Hospital, 250 East Superior Street, Suite 4-420 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays. To schedule an appointment please call appointment services at 312 472-4720

We know your time is important and though we try to be prompt, your appointment may be delayed because of unexpected patient problems. If that should happen we will attempt to notify you as soon as a significant delay becomes evident.

## **Teaching:**

As a member of the Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine faculty I enjoy my role as a mentor to medical students, surgery residents and breast surgery fellows. Northwestern Memorial Hospital is Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine's primary teaching hospital; therefore, trainees (surgical fellows, residents and medical students) may see you while you're a patient. I believe you will find them pleasant and eager to help.

## **Billing and Insurance:**

Northwestern Medicine will send you a monthly statement for your outstanding balance. Prior to your visit please confirm with your insurance company that Northwestern Medicine is included in your plan.

Your insurance plan may require a referral from your primary care physician. It is your responsibility to obtain this prior to your appointment. Many insurance plans require precertification for surgical procedures. Our staff will help you with this process but the ultimate responsibility for proper precertification rests with the patient.

## **Contact Information:**

Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center Scheduling, general information, nursing staff	312 472-4720
Kevin P. Bethke, M.D. email (encouraged)	312 472-4720 <a href="mailto:kbethke@nm.org">kbethke@nm.org</a>
After hours' care (answering service)	312 472-4720

## **About Dr. Bethke**

### **Background**

Dr. Kevin Bethke is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. He is the Associate Clinical Director of the Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center and Regional Director of Breast Surgery for Northwestern Medicine.

He received his undergraduate degree at St. Olaf College in Minnesota followed by a year at England's Oxford University studying Biomedical Ethics and then Medical School at the University of Minnesota. His General Surgery training was at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and his Surgical Oncology fellowship at the Medical College of Virginia.

### **Specialty and Interests**

Dr. Bethke's practice is limited to breast surgery with a focus on breast cancer. Although providing excellent patient care is his first priority, he also enjoys his role as a teacher and mentor for which he's received numerous teaching awards and is a member of the Department of Surgery's Teaching Hall of Fame. He is an enthusiastic supporter of research performed at the Lynn Sage Breast Center and actively enrolls patients into appropriate research studies.

### **Contributions to the Medical Field**

Dr. Bethke has published on a variety of breast disease topics and is a member of many medical societies including the American Society of Breast Surgeons, the Society of Surgical Oncology and he's a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He has been active in many cancer organizations including the American Cancer Society where he served as president of the Downtown Chicago Board.

### **Approach to Care**

Dr. Bethke believes in empowering patients by providing them with organized, pertinent information through thorough consultation discussions, email access, worksheets, web links and videos. His hope is that patients will feel comfortable asking any and all questions. As a surgeon, Dr. Bethke strives to not only perform the best cancer operation possible but also to assure the best cosmetic result.

## **Curriculum Vitae:**

**Specialty:** Breast Surgery

**Undergraduate Education:** St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN  
Oxford University, England, Biomedical Ethics

**Medical Education:** Univ. of Minnesota Medical School, Mpls, 1983

**Surgery Residency:** Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, 1989

**Surgical Oncology Fellowship:** Medical College of Virginia, 1991

**Academic Appointments:** Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery  
Northwestern Univ. Feinberg School of Medicine

**Board Certification:** Board certified in Surgery, since 1990

**Affiliations:** Assistant Professor of Clinical Surgery  
Northwestern Univ. Feinberg School of  
Medicine  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital

**Honors and Awards:** “Top Doctors” Castle-Connolly Awards  
“Top Doctors: Chicago”, “Top Doctors: Redbook”  
“Top Doctors:” Chicago Magazine  
Patient’s Choice Award 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015  
Patient’s Choice: America’s Most Compassionate Doctors Award 2011,  
2012, 2013, 2014, 2015  
Outstanding Teacher Award, Northwestern Univ.  
Dept. of Surgery, annually 2001-2011, 2013, 2014  
member of “Teaching Hall of Fame”  
President, American Cancer Society  
Chicago Downtown Board

## Web links

### Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Home page	<a href="http://www.nm.org">www.nm.org</a>
Surgery instructions	<a href="http://www.nm.org/nm/hospital+guide+surgical+instructions">www.nm.org/nm/hospital+guide+surgical+instructions</a>
Patient education	<a href="http://www.nm.org/nm/patiented">http://www.nm.org/nm/patiented</a>
Alberto Culver Women's Health Learning Center	<a href="http://www.nm.org/hlc">http://www.nm.org/hlc</a>

### Respected National Cancer Websites

American Cancer Society	<a href="http://www.cancer.org">www.cancer.org</a>
National Cancer Institute	<a href="http://www.cancer.gov">www.cancer.gov</a>
BreastCancer.org	<a href="http://www.breastcancer.org">http://www.breastcancer.org</a>
breast surgery photos	<a href="#">Photos</a>

### Chicago Area Cancer Support Groups

Cancer Wellness Center Northbrook	<a href="http://www.cancerwellness.org">http://www.cancerwellness.org</a>
Gilda's Club Chicago	<a href="http://www.gildasclubchicago.org">http://www.gildasclubchicago.org</a>

### Helping Kids Cope with Parent's Cancer

Kids Konected	<a href="http://kidskonected.org">http://kidskonected.org</a>
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### Breast Cancer Charities

The Breast Cancer Fund	<a href="http://www.breastcancerfund.org">www.breastcancerfund.org</a>
American Cancer Society	<a href="http://www.cancer.org">http://www.cancer.org</a>
Northwestern Memorial Foundation	<a href="http://www.nmh.org">http://www.nmh.org</a>

# **Step-by-Step Guide for Patients with Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer**

**Kevin P. Bethke, MD**

I've created this guide to help you navigate the medical system and to make the journey from initial diagnosis to surgical treatment as smooth as possible.

Although you have recently been diagnosed with breast cancer, don't panic. Often the most difficult aspect of being told you have a newly diagnosed breast cancer is fear of the unknown. This guide will help you gather the necessary information, obtain the appropriate tests and consultations and then make an informed and timely decision.

Together, we need to gather all of the pertinent information (mammograms, ultrasound, MRI, pathology results) and then develop a plan that is tailored to your specific circumstances. You'll have plenty of time to ask questions, seek second opinions and then make an informed and rational decision that is best for you. Remember, breast cancer is not a medical emergency but is often an emotional emergency.

Some patients will require many months of therapy after surgery. Therefore, you should look at the entire preoperative evaluation and treatment period as a "project", with you as the "project manager". Although my staff and I are always available to help you throughout this process you are your own best advocate and need to be fully involved in all decisions. One way to help manage all of the information and your test results is to keep everything together in a 3-ring binder or folder.

The nurses at the Lynn Sage Breast Center will be available to answer questions and help coordinate scheduling.

## **Contact Information:**

**Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center**      **(312) 472-4720**  
**(appointments, nursing questions**  
**and general information)**

**Kevin P. Bethke, MD**      **(312) 472-4720**  
**(email is encouraged)**      **kbethke@nm.org**

## **1. Schedule Appointment**

\_\_\_ a. Call (312) 472-4720

\_\_\_ b. The scheduling staff will explain what you need to do before your appointment, email you FAQ's and detailed instructions. You must follow instructions very closely in order to prevent delays in your evaluation/treatment.

\_\_\_ c. Once you've made an appointment, one of our Lynn Sage Breast Center staff may contact you to obtain basic information about you and your diagnosis.

## **2. Breast Imaging**

\_\_\_ a. If your breast imaging was performed at Northwestern, our staff will review reports and help determine if additional imaging or biopsies are required. Be aware that the need for additional imaging may not be clear until after you see me in consultation.

\_\_\_ b. If your breast imaging was done elsewhere it will need to be submitted to our radiologists for their review. The Breast Center staff will instruct you on what studies need to be submitted, and where to deliver them. This review can take up to a week or more and once completed it is very likely that our radiologists will recommend additional imaging (mammogram, ultrasound and/or breast MRI). If additional studies are recommended, the Breast Center staff will help coordinate this scheduling.

## **3. Pathology Review**

\_\_\_ a. If your biopsy was done elsewhere you will need to have the actual pathology slides or tissue block delivered to Northwestern for review. Once delivered, it will be submitted to our pathologists for review and confirmation of the diagnosis. This step is not necessary if your biopsy was performed at Northwestern.

## **4. Consultation with Dr. Bethke, MD**

\_\_\_ a. You will meet with me at the Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center located on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Northwestern's Prentice Women's Hospital.

\_\_\_ b. Many of the usual billing, health information and consent forms will need to be completed for your first visit. These will be emailed to you prior to your visit.

\_\_\_ c. At the time of your consultation you will meet with myself and the nursing staff. You may also meet a breast surgery fellow or medical student. Northwestern is a teaching institution and you will find the trainees eager to help.

\_\_\_ d. I will review your imaging studies, pathology results, examine you and then we'll review your options together. I may show you your actual imaging studies and I'll use worksheets and possibly photos to help illustrate my recommendation and explain the reasons for them.

\_\_\_ e. If we decide that you need additional breast imaging the Breast Center staff will help coordinate scheduling.

\_\_\_ f. You will have plenty of opportunities to ask questions during and after the consultation.

## 5. Surgery

\_\_\_ a. Once all studies have been obtained and a decision has been made regarding your best surgical option, my staff will coordinate the scheduling. Prior to surgery you may require:

\_\_\_ Plastic surgery consultation regarding reconstruction options

\_\_\_ Medical clearance for surgery from your primary care physician or the Northwestern Surgical Preoperative Clinic

\_\_\_ Consultation with Medical or Radiation Oncology (these consultations usually follow surgery once the final pathology results are available)

\_\_\_ b. My staff will work with you to optimize scheduling. Please realize that the entire pre-operative evaluation can take 2-3 weeks or longer. If you're undergoing immediate reconstruction the surgery date will need to be coordinated with the plastic surgery team

\_\_\_ c. The final operating room schedule is not available until the day before your surgery. Hospital staff will call you and tell you when to arrive at the Prentice Women's Hospital and give you special preoperative instructions.

\_\_\_ d. Please be patient. The times you're given for surgery are an approximation. Delays can and do occur because preceding operations may take longer than expected for a variety of reasons.

\_\_\_ e. The pathology results will be available approximately 5-6 days after surgery. I will personally call you with the results.

## 6. Postoperative Care

\_\_\_ a. A separate postoperative care instruction sheet ("Breast Surgery Discharge Instructions") can be found under the heading "Postoperative Instructions" in your information packet.

\_\_\_ b. I generally see patients 1 ½-2 weeks after surgery. At that time I will examine the incision(s), remove drains if present and review the pathology report with you. We'll then discuss any further treatment and consultations. There is a good chance that you will need to see both medical oncology, regarding possible chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy, and radiation oncology regarding postoperative radiation therapy. These consultations usually take place 1-3 weeks after surgery. We will help you see the oncologist of your choice or we'll recommend one for you.

\_\_\_ c. I will follow you over the next five years as will your other oncologists. I will generally see you 1-3 weeks after surgery (postoperative check), 6 months after surgery and then yearly.

## 7. Your Breast Cancer Healthcare Team

Your healthcare team will include a variety of medical professionals. You may not need all of these medical providers but they are all available to you. Once a week our entire team meets as a multidisciplinary group to review the more unusual patient cases and help formulate a treatment plan. All of your medical records are easily accessible to members of the team and any Northwestern physician via the Northwestern Electronic Medical Record (EPIC).

**Surgical Oncologist (Breast Surgeon):** Dr. Bethke specializes in breast surgery and focuses on breast cancer. He will lead the preoperative evaluation, perform the appropriate surgery and help plan your follow-up care and other oncology consultations.

**Medical Oncologist:** An MD who specializes in treating cancer with chemotherapy, endocrine therapy and biological therapy.

**Radiation Oncologist:** An MD who specializes in treating cancer with radiation.

**Plastic Surgeon:** An MD who specializes in reconstructing the breast after a mastectomy

**Breast Radiologist:** An MD who specializes in screening for breast cancer, diagnosing breast cancer with image-guided needle biopsy and preoperative planning using mammography, ultrasound MRI and other techniques

**Breast Pathologist:** An MD who specializes in the evaluation and identification of breast tissue abnormalities. They microscopically review all needle biopsy and surgical specimens and provide the diagnosis.

**Oncology nurse:** An RN who provides care, support and education during your cancer treatment

**Nurse Navigator:** An RN who can assist you at every stage of your cancer care, from scheduling treatments to accessing social and financial resources

**Social worker:** A professional who can help you deal with psychological and social issues as well as financial concerns, including insurance matters

**Rehabilitation specialist:** (physical or occupational therapist)-a professional who can assist with restoring or improving movement or who can help you perform daily activities more easily

**Cancer Geneticist:** A professional who specializes in diagnosing inheritable cancer syndromes such as the BRCA (breast cancer) gene mutation which predisposes one to a higher risk for breast and ovarian cancer.

**Oncofertility specialist:** Physicians and other healthcare professional who can help you with fertility issues which arise before, during and after cancer treatment

## Breast Cancer Treatment Worksheet

Patient name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

### Pathology

Invasive cancer:        *Infiltrating ductal*        *Infiltrating lobular*        *Mixed*

Non-invasive cancer:    *DCIS (Ductal Carcinoma In-Situ)*

Grade: *1 2 3*        Estrogen receptor:    *positive negative*

Side: *Right Left*    Her 2:                    *positive negative*

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Treatment Options:

#### A. Breast Conservation (generally referred to as a *Lumpectomy*):

In order to be a candidate for breast conservation the cancer needs to be localized to a relatively small area of the breast so that we can encompass it with a lumpectomy, obtain clear margins and still have enough breast tissue left such that there is no major deformity.

The components of Breast Conservation include: (usually performed as an outpatient under twilight anesthesia)

**1. Lumpectomy:** (with preoperative wire localization if cancer cannot be felt on exam). About 15% of the time the margins are found to be positive on final pathologic review and a second (30-45 min) procedure is necessary to remove more tissue and clear the margins. Pathology results are available 5-6 days after surgery.

**2. Sentinel lymph node biopsy:** (radioactive dye). Sentinel node biopsy is not necessary for most noninvasive cancers (DCIS). Generally, 1-5 sentinel nodes are removed with the average being 3. If the nodes do not contain cancer then no further surgery under the arm is necessary. If the nodes are positive for cancer cells then a follow-up axillary dissection may be necessary, however the trend is to do fewer axillary dissections.

**3. Axillary Dissection:** This is the removal of additional lymph nodes and may be required if your sentinel nodes contain cancer. If performed, a small drain will be placed under the arm and it will remain in place for 10-14 days. This procedure raises the risk of lymphedema (arm swelling) to approximately 15-20%, compared to sentinel node biopsy alone which has a 2-3% risk of lymphedema.

**4. Radiation Therapy:** Lumpectomy patients generally require postoperative radiation therapy to the entire breast, which is given 5 days/week for 3-6 weeks. Some patients may be eligible for a shorter course of radiation to the whole breast or partial breast radiation. A newer technique called Intraoperative Radiation Therapy (IORT) is an option for a very select group of patients (over 60 years old, small, slow-growing cancer). Some older patients with small, slow-growing cancers may not require radiation at all. You will consult with a Radiation Oncologist after surgery and together the two of you will determine your best radiation therapy option.

**5. Systemic Therapy:** Systemic therapy includes chemotherapy which is a combination of drugs given intravenously to kill any cells that may have escaped to other parts of the body prior to surgery. Other forms of systemic therapy include hormonal therapy (such as Tamoxifen or Arimidex) and biological therapy (such as Herceptin). The recommendation for systemic therapy is made by the **Medical Oncologist** and depends on a number of factors such as patient age, size of tumor, lymph node involvement, grade, estrogen receptor status, Oncotype testing, etc. Radiation therapy and systemic therapy have different goals and are not mutually exclusive.

## **B. Mastectomy:**

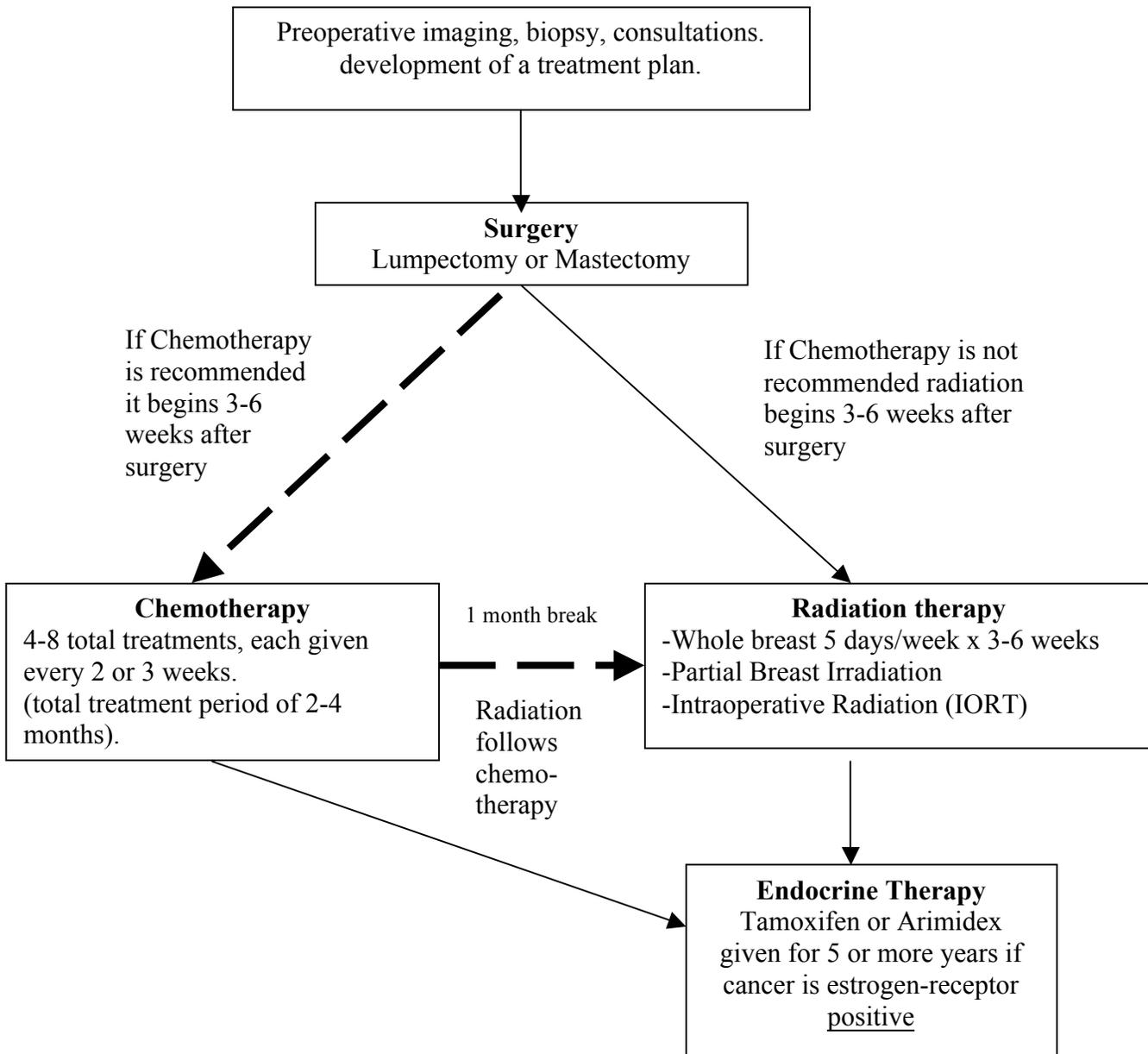
Patients who have very large cancers or cancer cells scattered over a large portion of the breast are not candidates for breast conservation and therefore require a mastectomy: Some patients may prefer a mastectomy even if they are a candidate for breast conservation. Radiation is usually not necessary after a mastectomy. Mastectomy options include:

- 1. Skin-sparing mastectomy with immediate reconstruction:** Most of the breast skin is preserved but the nipple-areolar complex is removed. After the mastectomy and sentinel lymph node biopsy is completed (and follow-up axillary dissection if the sentinel lymph node contains cancer) the Plastic Surgery team comes into the operating room and performs the first phase of the immediate reconstruction. You will meet with your **Plastic Surgeon** prior to the day of surgery to decide the appropriate reconstruction technique. Options include temporary expander followed by permanent implant, TRAM (DIEP) flap or latissimus dorsi flap.
- 2. Nipple-sparing mastectomy:** Patients may be candidates for nipple-sparing mastectomy if they have small breasts (A or B cup), it is a prophylactic mastectomy or the cancer is small and not close to the nipple. If the breast is large, the blood supply to the nipple-areola complex may be inadequate and the nipple may not survive. If the cancer is too close to the nipple area there may be a higher risk of recurrence. As in all forms of mastectomy there is permanent numbness over the central breast and no sensation to the nipple if it is preserved.
- 3. Traditional mastectomy without reconstruction:** If a patient chooses this option she will have a flat chest on the side of the mastectomy and can wear a prosthesis that fits inside her bra.

When a mastectomy is performed, postoperative radiation is generally not necessary unless the cancer is more than 5 cm. in diameter, lymph nodes are involved with cancer or margins are close or positive. The recommendation for chemotherapy is the same whether one chooses breast conservation or a mastectomy. A mastectomy without reconstruction or with expander reconstruction generally requires an overnight stay in the hospital. When the reconstruction is performed with your own tissue (TRAM flap or latissimus flap) the hospital stay is generally several days.

The overall survival is exactly the same whether breast conservation or a mastectomy is performed. The risk of the cancer returning within the affected breast or on the chest wall is approximately 5-6% for breast conservation and 2-3% for a mastectomy. If the cancer recurs in the breast after a lumpectomy a mastectomy is generally required at the time of the recurrence.

## Timeline:



*Breast cancer is **NOT** a medical emergency but it is often an emotional emergency.*

You have time to gather all the necessary information, obtain a complete breast imaging evaluation and seek second opinions if you wish. You need to make sure that you are comfortable with your physicians and your decisions before proceeding.

## **Follow-up Care**

Following the treatment of your breast cancer you will be seen approximately every 3-4 months the first two years and every 6 months for years 2-5 by one of your oncologists. You may have three different oncologists- Surgical, Medical (in charge of chemotherapy and perhaps hormonal therapy) and Radiation. We will generally try to stagger your visits so that you're not seeing all of us at short intervals. If you underwent breast conservation surgery (lumpectomy) you will obtain a mammogram on the affected breast about 6 months after completion of radiation and then yearly.

## **Services offered by the Lynn Sage Comprehensive Breast Center, the Lurie Cancer Center and Northwestern Memorial Hospital**

### **Oncofertility Program**

For patients concerned about fertility issues during and after their breast cancer treatment

- [www.oncofertility.northwestern.edu](http://www.oncofertility.northwestern.edu)

### **Breast Cancer Survivorship Program**

The SUCCEED Program focuses on surveillance and early detection of cancer, treatment of after-effects from breast cancer therapy, psychological and wellness concerns, as well as strategies for healthy living.

### **Reproductive Genetics, Hereditary Cancer Services**

Provides hereditary cancer risk assessment, genetic testing, cancer screening recommendations and an ovarian cancer screening program

### **NovaCare Rehabilitation Services**

Provides pre-surgical classes, education on exercise programs after surgery and lymphedema prevention counseling and treatment

### **Alberto Culver Women's Health Learning Center**

Located in the first floor lobby of Northwestern's Prentice Women's Hospital, the Center provides numerous educational materials on breast health as well as all other women's health issues.

- [www.nm.org/hlc](http://www.nm.org/hlc)

### **Program 360**

An Integrative Medicine program that combines conventional and complementary therapies to aid in your healing process. It engages the mind, body, spirit and community and focuses on lifestyle choices.

## **What to do, and what not to do, when your friend is diagnosed with breast cancer**

*Here is some guidance for that first dreadful moment when you learn that someone you care about has breast cancer.*

### **DO.....**

- Send cards and emails. Just a short little note will do. She isn't scrutinizing your words; she is just happy to know that another person is rooting for her.
- Make sure she knows you do not expect a reply to emails or phone calls.
- Send a card addressed specifically to her husband or partner. They need attention and support too.
- Send along any information about local doctors. A good referral can help her feel more confident in her choices. But once she has made her choice, support her decision.
- Take her kids somewhere fun so she can return calls and talk openly. The weeks just after a diagnosis involve many decisions that require much discussion and consideration. Kids can make that very difficult.
- Offer to spread the word for her to anyone in particular she wants to know. She may feel guilty that she is unable to call certain people personally. It will ease her mind if you can call special friends and gently share her news.
- Volunteer to do specific tasks, like bringing dinner by or dropping off some groceries.

### **DON'T.....**

- Be afraid to reach out even if you don't know her well. A card is always appreciated.
- Ask for too much detail or explanation; she is reporting out to many people and may need a break.
- Expect her to call you back promptly.

### **BE AWARE.....**

- In the early days, she may feel cut off by comments like: "My friend had breast cancer two years ago and she's fine!"
- Some books, like Lance Armstrong's, might overwhelm her. His cancer was extreme and his chemo experience may scare her.
- Every message counts. Your note or call may not feel like much to you, but combined with every other note or call she gets, it becomes a tidal wave of support to carry her from the initial shock into the beginning of treatment.

## **Talking to Your Friend**

*If you feel nervous about talking with your friend, here are some pointers from cancer patients.*

### **Be yourself and don't be afraid.**

Your friend doesn't expect perfection. Some people have a knack for expression, some people are lost. Your friend sees that you care and that you are doing your best.

### **Don't push advice.**

You probably don't know enough about her case to really be useful. It can be tiresome to hear "My friend Paula had breast cancer and she said that her doctors recommended chemo every week..."

### **When in doubt, email an offer of help or companionship.**

Unreturned phone calls can be a weight on your friend. Also, the phone ringing might wake her up or force her to think about cancer during a time when she is not. Always end a message with "No need to reply; I am just thinking about you."

### **Listen more than you talk.**

You are there for her. Give her some runway to talk about whatever's on her mind ...an annoying insurance problem, a funny card she got, an aching back, her old car that isn't selling.

### **Don't force the cancer conversation.**

If she's trying to talk about her husband's nasty boss, and you came to get the latest update on her treatment, stick with the nasty boss stories. Cancer isn't the only thing going on her life.

### **Don't expect her to follow up on every suggestion.**

Many people will suggest that she call their friend who had breast cancer or read a new article about an ongoing clinical trial. These can be very helpful, but can also feel like another thing for the To Do list. Just pass the info along in a card or email and leave it there.

**Focus. Take off your coat, sit down, turn off your cell phone.** If your friend starts to open up and vent, stay with her. It helps to tell your friend up front how long you can spend so she doesn't worry that her mood sent you packing.

**Don't rush her through the hard stuff.** Your friend is sick, scared, bald, uncomfortable, and tired. Try not to quickly stifle these truths with platitudes like, "You've got to stay positive" and "This is going to be over soon". Let her complain and cry and feel a little self-pity before you start to help her put herself back together again.

**Respect her experience.** Don't say, "I know how you feel" unless you actually do. Don't say "My friend had the exact same thing and she's doing great." Every cancer case has unique elements.

*Taken from Circus Of Cancer, [www.circusofcancer.org](http://www.circusofcancer.org), a how-to-site to help you step right up when your friend has breast cancer.*

# Breast Surgery

## Post-operative Instructions

### Lumpectomy, Mastectomy, Axillary Dissection

Kevin P. Bethke, MD

#### General Instructions

The following instructions will provide helpful information that will assist your recovery. These are designed to be general guidelines. Remember, everyone recovers differently. Listen to your body and rest when you are tired. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact my staff or myself.

#### Restrictions

- There are no lifting weight restrictions for the arm on the surgical side. You may gradually increase the amount of weight based on your comfort level. You should avoid a lot of repetitious activity with the arm until the drain is out (if one was placed) and the wound is well-healed (about two weeks).
- You should not drive a car until you believe you can react to an emergency situation and you're no longer taking narcotic pain medications.
- You may shower the day after surgery. You should not bathe or swim (ie submerge wound) until the wound is well healed (about two weeks).

#### Exercise

- You may begin arm exercises within a couple days. Do these 2 or 3 times per day, beginning with light exercise and gradually increase your range of motion and repetitions. This will help your arm regain full mobility.
- You will have pain medication prescribed before discharge. Take this as directed to relieve pain. It is important that you be comfortable so that you may continue your stretching exercises.
- If you find the medication prescribed is too strong, try Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen.
- If you feel that your range of motion is not improving as quickly as you would like, please let our nursing staff know and they can order physical therapy for you

#### Wound Care

- You may remove the gauze dressing on the first or second postoperative day and then shower.
- You should keep gauze dressing on the wound until the wound is completely dry and without drainage-usually 1-3 days.
- If an elastic bandage was placed around your chest after the surgery you may remove it on the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> day after surgery. If you prefer to leave it on longer, you may.
- You may wear a bra. Sport bras are usually the most comfortable and give the best support. If the breast doesn't move it is less painful.

### **Drain Care (if placed at time of axillary dissection or mastectomy)**

- Empty the drain and **strip** the tubing 2-3 times daily, more often if the plastic squeeze bottle fills up. This will prevent the tubing from clogging.
  - Starting at the top of the tubing next to your body firmly grasp the tubing with the index finger and thumb of one hand. With the other hand use the index finger and thumb to move the fluid down the tubing (this is called “stripping the tubing”).
  - Uncap the pouring spout and squeeze the contents of the plastic bottle into the measuring cup.
  - Squeeze the bottle **flat** to create suction and replace the cap while squeezing to maintain the vacuum.
  - Measure and record the output and discard the fluid into the toilet. Record the output each time you empty the bottle.
  - Keep track of the output (drainage) and when the total is down to 30 cc’s or less over a 24-hour period we’ll remove the drain in the office.
  - Drain removal takes about 30 seconds and is virtually painless. The suture is cut and the drain easily slides out. You should call the Breast Center as the output approaches 30 cc’s over 24 hours so that we may schedule an office visit for drain removal.

### **Pain Medication**

You will be given a prescription for a narcotic pain medication (usually Norco) upon discharge. Many patients have very little pain and don’t want to use the narcotic. Don’t be afraid to use it if you’re uncomfortable. You may want to take it before bedtime to improve sleep. If you’d prefer, you may substitute Tylenol or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil).

### **Pathology Report**

The Pathology report is usually available 5-6 days following your surgery. I will call you with the results once the report is available.

### **Notify my office if:**

- Your temperature is over 101.5 F
- You notice increasing swelling, redness, warmth or drainage from around the incision or drain site.

**If you experience any problems, please call the Lynn Sage Breast Center 24/7 and either a nurse or the physician on call will respond.**

**Lynn Sage Breast Center**  
(nursing and answering service)

**(312) 472-4720**

# Breast Reconstruction Options

Kevin P. Bethke, MD

## American Society of Plastic Surgery

**For a thorough discussion of reconstructive options and multimedia presentations with photos, videos and realistic expectations please go to the American Society of Plastic Surgery website (below)**

<http://www.plasticsurgery.org/Reconstructive-Procedures/Breast-Reconstruction.html>

If your breast cancer is quite large relative to your breast size or the cancer is scattered throughout your breast you will not have the option of a lumpectomy and you will require a mastectomy, either with or without immediate reconstruction. Also, some patients may choose a mastectomy even though they are candidates for a lumpectomy.

The overall survival is the same whether you have a mastectomy or a lumpectomy with follow-up radiation therapy. The risk of a local recurrence (recurring near the lumpectomy site) after a lumpectomy and radiation therapy is about 5-8% versus about 3% with a mastectomy. If you initially underwent lumpectomy and radiation therapy and then had a recurrence you would most likely require a subsequent mastectomy.

If you don't have immediate reconstruction your chest will be flat and you can then wear a prosthesis inside your bra in order to achieve form and symmetry. The option of delayed reconstruction at a later date is available but it is more difficult. This is because when we do an immediate reconstruction we usually preserve most of the skin but the breast tissue beneath the skin is removed. When the mastectomy is finished the Plastic Surgery team completes the first phase of the immediate reconstruction. This is done by filling the space between the preserved skin and chest wall, either with a temporary expander that is later replaced with a permanent implant or with your own tissue.

If the reconstruction is delayed we need to take more skin to avoid folds of excess skin on the chest wall which would create an irregular surface and make it difficult to achieve a good fit for a prosthesis. Before the Plastic Surgeons can complete a delayed reconstruction the skin needs to be stretched over several months to develop an adequate skin covering for the underlying reconstruction.

There are 3 main types of reconstruction techniques:

1. Temporary expander followed by a permanent implant
2. DIEP/TRAM flap or a variation (taking tissue from lower abdominal wall).
3. Latissimus flap (using tissue from your back and swinging it around to the chest)

These reconstructive techniques are combined with either a skin-sparing mastectomy (standard procedure removing nipple-areolar complex but preserving skin) or a nipple-sparing mastectomy.

Generally the more complex the surgery the more natural the look and feel of the reconstruction. Often a breast reduction and/or lift of the opposite breast are required to achieve symmetry. Prior to making any decisions on reconstruction you will meet with the Plastic Surgeon and they will carefully review with you the various options and together the two of you will decide the best method for you.

## **Reconstruction Procedures**

### **1. Expander/implant reconstruction**

#### **Advantages**

- Least amount of surgery
- No additional scars
- Advantages greater with bilateral reconstruction

#### **Disadvantages**

- Two step procedure: temporary expander at initial surgery followed by a permanent implant at a later time
- May be difficult to match opposite side
- Greater risk of infection and overlying skin loss
- Difficult to get normal tear drop (ptotic) shape of breast (too round)

### **2. DIEP/TRAM flap reconstruction**

- Muscle and skin from the lower abdomen is used to fill the space created by removing all the breast tissue from beneath the skin
- Variations include pedicled, free, DIEP and muscle-sparing

#### **Advantages:**

- One stage
- Most natural shape and feel
- Also get abdominoplasty (tummy tuck)

#### **Disadvantages:**

- Most surgery, longest recovery
- Abdominal scar
- Can develop fat necrosis of tissue (lumpiness)

### **3. Latissimus flap reconstruction**

- Advantages
  - Intermediate surgery
  - One stage reconstruction
  - Intermediate result
- Disadvantages
  - Scar on back
  - Usually requires an implant in addition to flap for adequate size
  - Infection risk with implant
  - Muscle and nerve division

### **4. Nipple-sparing mastectomy**

With a nipple-sparing mastectomy the nipple-areolar complex is preserved rather than removed as in a standard skin-sparing mastectomy. In both types of mastectomy all of the breast tissue from the lower fold of the breast to the collarbone and from the mid chest (sternum) to the lateral chest is removed.

Nipple-sparing mastectomies are a relatively new concept. There has always been some concern about a higher risk of the cancer recurring in the nipple-areolar area if it is preserved. So far, research has not shown this to be a problem if used for prophylactic mastectomies or in patients with small cancers located a distance from the nipple.

#### **Advantage of nipple-sparing mastectomy:**

- Best cosmetic result

#### **Disadvantages of nipple-sparing mastectomy:**

- Theoretical higher risk of cancer recurrence
- Literature shows about a 5-10% risk of all or part of the nipple-areolar skin dying.  
It is then removed and you end up with a skin-sparing mastectomy
- Nipple has no sensation (there is always a strip of numbness across the chest with any mastectomy)
- The nipple may lose its protrusion and the areolar may fade slightly over time