

Breast Surgery: What to Expect

What is the role of a nurse navigator?

All patients diagnosed with breast cancer are assigned a nurse navigator. The navigator will assist you in getting an appointment with a breast surgeon and will also assist you throughout your care. This includes setting you up for tests, appointments with doctors in other disciplines and answering your questions along the way. The navigator is also available to answer questions around your diagnosis, the terminology and what this all means. The nurse navigator will see you in preparation for your surgery and oftentimes either during your hospital course and/or postoperatively. The navigator is always available to answer your questions or assist with any needs.

What happens at my consult?

Your consult is an appointment in which you get to meet your surgeon. The date of your consult is not the date you will be going to the operating room. You will talk with your surgeon and discuss your treatment options. Your surgeon will be able to answer any questions you may have concerning your diagnosis and treatment. When you agree on a plan of care, you may be asked to sign a surgical consent, which discusses the pros and cons of surgery. It is always helpful to bring a family member or friend to this appointment so you have an extra set of ears to hear the discussion and recommendations.

When will I know my surgical date?

During your initial consultation with your surgeon he/she will discuss the likely time frame for your surgery. Your surgeon's office staff will call you to confirm an appointment.

How should I prepare for my surgery?

If you smoke, it is important for you to stop. Smoking increases your risk of lung problems and poor wound healing from your surgery. Please call your PCP or surgeon's office if you need assistance with smoking cessation. It is also important to continue to eat healthfully prior to surgery. However, you will be instructed to stop eating/drinking after midnight the evening prior to your surgery.

You will either receive a call from a nurse or be asked to come into the hospital to speak with someone to discuss your upcoming surgery and make sure you are cleared for anesthesia. This is called a pre-admission testing appointment. You will be instructed by the pre-admission testing group as to which of the medications you currently take should be held prior to surgery. If you have questions concerning this, please ask or speak with your nurse navigator.

Your nurse navigator or surgeon will give you a form with pre-surgery showering instructions. Following these instructions will help decrease any infection that may occur.

Please make sure you have someone to drive you home from the hospital after surgery is completed.

Where do I report on the day of surgery?

Your surgeon's office staff will call you prior to surgery with the information as to where to report. They will also send you written directions with all of the information.

What should I expect the day of surgery?

You should shower as instructed the morning of surgery. Wear comfortable clothing. Do not wear any jewelry or bring any valuables with you to the hospital. If you were instructed to take medication, please do so with just enough water to swallow the pills. Otherwise you should remain without anything to eat or drink.

Upon checking into the hospital, you will be escorted to the holding area. Your family member or friend may accompany you to this area until you go into the operating room. A pre-op nurse will get you settled and changed into a hospital gown. You will meet with your surgical team including the anesthesiologist, surgeon and others who may be assisting during your procedure.

An experienced anesthesia nurse or doctor will place an intravenous line (IV) that will provide you with anesthesia during surgery. A member of your surgical team will mark which breast(s) will be operated on.

As part of our commitment to patient safety, you will be asked numerous times during your stay to state your name, date of birth and the surgical procedure you are having.

What should my family expect the day of surgery?

There is a waiting area for family or friends who will be at the hospital while you are in surgery. Your family will be told how long the surgery is expected to take and when they should expect an update from the surgeon.

What should I expect after surgery?

If you are not staying overnight in the hospital following surgery, you will be in the recovery room for a few hours until your team feels you are ready to be sent home. You will be given instructions on how to care for yourself at home. You will be given a phone number to call if you have any questions once you are home. You may also call your nurse navigator with any questions.

If you are staying in the hospital, you will be brought to the recovery room and once the team feels you are ready, you will be moved to your inpatient room.

How long will it take me to recover and what follow-up care should I expect?

Your recovery from surgery will depend on the procedure that is done. Typically your recovery from a lumpectomy is faster than recovery from a mastectomy. You may receive a call from your nurse navigator after surgery to check in on your recovery. An appointment will be made for you to come in two-to-four weeks after surgery to discuss your healing progress, remove any drains and set up the next step in your overall breast care.