

External Breast Prosthesis and Chest Support Framework Information Sheet

An external breast prosthesis is a prosthetic product worn to replace breast tissue after surgery or due to other reasons to ensure symmetry to the chest outline. They are typically used instead of reconstruction of breast tissue or surgical implants although some products are designed to be adjustable and can therefore be used alongside breast reconstruction or wide local excision surgery to provide the optimum shape and result.

External breast prosthesis or 'forms' come in four main categories:

- **Whole breast:** These are designed to replace a whole breast after mastectomy surgery.
- **Partial breast:** These are designed for use after lumpectomy surgery or incomplete mastectomy where only a portion of breast tissue is missing and fill in an uneven profile.
- **Soft Forms:** These are often textile based and may have additional fibre that can be added or removed to adjust the size or fullness. They are worn in a pocketed bra, often sold as a mastectomy bra.
- **Leisure Prosthesis:** These are products that can be worn for use during exercise including swimming. They usually have channels at the back or may be bead filled to allow water drainage and reduce sweat build up.

Promoting Choice

Current Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT) guidance recommends women are offered breast reconstruction surgery where mastectomy is required for breast cancer. However, not all women will want to undergo additional surgery, and some may have co-morbidities that prevent further surgery.

The need for women to have a choice in their treatment is a cornerstone of patient centred care. This must include the provision of breast prosthesis. Women may feel vulnerable having had body changing surgery, often with an associated cancer diagnosis. Engaging them in shared decision making for the fitting process and product selection can go a long way to supporting them to feel body confident after surgery, demonstrating dignity and respect.

The fit, style, shape, weight and colour should be considered in product selection in collaboration between the person fitting the product and the end user who will be wearing the product daily. We have a wide range of products available including various skin tones, colours and designs to facilitate meeting the persons individual needs. Your trust should consider how your local buying policies and service provision can best support meaningful shared decision making that enable women to exercise their right to high quality, equitable patient centred care.

Most of the whole and partial breast prostheses are made of silicone. The silicone may be gel based for a soft skin like texture, have air whipped into it like a foam to make the products lighter or formed as a shell with a gap between the back of the product and the skin.

Breast shape varies based on individual characteristics and consequently breast prostheses come in a wide range of weights, shapes, sizes and colours that enhance the fitting options for the individual to meet their own needs.

The breast prostheses may be adhesive and designed to stick directly to the skin with an additional adhesive plate of silicone. Most products are designed to be worn in a pocket within a bra and have either a flat back or a moulded or shaped back to create a space that allows for air circulation. To get the best fit for a prosthesis many manufacturers recommend it is fitted with a well fitted bra. The NHS does not routinely fund prosthesis bras. Many women are directed to purchase a

mastectomy or prosthesis bra from a high street retailer or from a company that supplies breast prostheses. Some suppliers provide local fitting clinics in a hospital setting and may provide a voucher to purchase a bra at a reduced cost or provide a free bra. Some trusts use charitable funds to purchase bras.

Currently NHS guidance supports provision of a breast prosthesis at a minimum of every two years. Most products last much longer than two years if well looked after although some adhesive products may require new adhesive pads within a shorter time. In addition, some women may purchase additional prostheses for leisure wear to use when undertaking activities such as high impact gym exercise or swimming, or they may choose a product that can be used for leisure as well as routine use as their product of choice.

After mastectomy surgery, women are often provided with a soft form before they are discharged from hospital - sometimes called a softie. They may have been recommended to purchase a suitable mastectomy bra before admission to hospital or may be provided with one in hospital. This is typically a lightweight soft bra suitable for use after surgery that is pocketed and/or a fabric textile or foam-based prosthesis to wear in the bra on the side of the mastectomy. The soft forms are available in standard sizes, often in a triangle shape. Whilst they can be used for as long as needed they are not as robust as a silicone prosthesis.

Fitting services for silicone-based breast prosthesis are offered in most trusts. Fitting may be undertaken by any suitably qualified person. Services vary from being delivered by the breast care nurse team (registered nurses or health care assistants), orthotics or appliance services (technical assistants) or by company employed fitters who visit the trust clinic to deliver the service under a local service level agreement.

Our External Breast and Chest Support framework encompasses external prosthesis and a wide range of bras and other chest support garments.

To provide a useful product taxonomy the products have been assigned descriptions based on the product characteristics and variations to enable better selection of alternatives. This moves away from using specific supplier-based language although brand information indicating the product range is also available within the product listing as many fitters know the products by brand and range.

The key product types are listed below. In addition to these the catalogue descriptions also include whether the prosthesis has an adhesive back, a flat or moulded back and the colour.

Prosthesis Type	Style and Feature	Weight	Shape	Size
Whole Breast and Partial Breast	Traditional Gel Filled Temperature Balancing Adaptable Firm	Standard weight Light weight Extra light weight	Triangle Teardrop Asymmetric left Asymmetric right Oval Heart	Size 00-18
Soft Form	Fibre filled		Triangle Teardrop Oval	Size 1-14
	Foam weighted Foam non-weighted		Triangle Asymmetric left Asymmetric right	Size 1-14
Leisure Form			Triangle	Size 00-18

Traditional silicone gel style products are soft to touch and offer a skin like drape and feel. They are typically standard weight unless additional air has been incorporated into the silicone to reduce weight.

Temperature balancing indicates products that have a design to reduce temperature on the chest wall when wearing the prosthesis. This may include specific cooling gel formulations or moulded features that enable enhanced air flow between the back of the prosthesis and the skin.

Adaptive features enable the product size or volume to be adjusted. This may be the addition or removal of material or air, for example.

Firm products are categorised by the absence of gel silicone. They may be shaped like a shell allowing air circulation and a better fit with uneven scarring.

Chest Support and Bras

Bras are supplied for purchase via our catalogue that meet a clinical need. They are characterised by style and use.

An encapsulation style indicates a bra that is shaped by panels of material sewn together. These typically provide the shape and support required for a prosthesis.

A compression style bra has a smooth seamless cup and presses the breast tissue to the chest rather than lifting and separating the breasts. The compression refers to the style and not the level of pressure the product provides.

A prosthesis bra is pocketed to enable the user to wear a prosthesis. Both encapsulation and compression style bras may be pocketed.

Surgical Bras and Chest Support

A surgical bra indicates a product that is suitable for wearing after surgery and usually offers additional pressure to support wound healing.

Like a chest spiker, garments that provide compression around the chest are useful in thoracic surgery to support sternal wounds and reduce pain. These may be unisex garments and can be available as a short vest style garment to provide even distribution of support.

For people with large breasts there can be additional complications of breast tissue creating drag on a sternotomy wound or increasing infection risk if the breast tissue is allowed to rest over an incision. Side support bras offer additional depth and support under the arm to reduce the drag and spill of breasts when lying down. This supports healing for sternotomy wounds after chest surgery. Some poor practices of breasts being taped flat against the chest exist both in theatre and post operatively which is both undignified for the patient and can cause skin damage.

Surgical bras with a compression style would typically be used to keep a surgical implant in place and may be used alone or with a compression band to prevent migration of an implant.

Compression treatment bras have measured compression and can be used to treat lymphoedema of the chest.

Fastening

Bras may have either a front fastening mechanism which is useful during post operative healing when arm movement and reach is reduced or back fastening. Some of the surgical bras also have drop down straps with hook and loop fastening that enable the garment to be laid under the patient and fastened without moving the arms or to drop one cup for wound examination.

Fastenings are varied and include the more traditional hook and eye or alternatives such as a zip front fastening or hook and loop for adjustability and ease of fastening with restricted strength and movement.

Product Group	Type	Style/Feature	Fastening
Bras	Prosthesis Bra	Post op Compression style	Front fastening Back fastening
		Post op with soft form	
		Radiotherapy Compression style	
		Encapsulation style	
	Surgical Bra	Sterile post op	
		Side support bra	
		Compression style bra	
		Compression style and band	
		Compression band	
	Compression Treatment Bra	Lymphoedema bra Up to 17mm Hg	
		Lymphoedema bra Over 17mm Hg	