

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

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## Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.

For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

Te informacje mogą zostać na żądanie przedstawione w formatach alternatywnych, takich jak łatwy do czytania lub duża czcionka, i w różnych językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 02082238934.

Macluumaadkan waxaa lagu heli karaa qaabab kale, sida akhriska fudud ama daabacaadda wayn, oo waxaa lagu heli karaa luqaddo kale, marka la codsado. Fadlan la xidhiidh 02082238934.

এই তথ্য বিকল্প ফরম্যাটে, যেমন সহজে পড়া যায় অথবা ডি বিন্ট প্রিং আপনার অনুব্রাটে বিকল্প ভাষায় পাওয়া যেতে পারে। অনুগ্রহপূর্বক যোগাযোগ করুন 02082238934।

Bu bilgiler, okuması kolay veya büyük baskılar gibi alternatif biçimlerde ve talep üzerine alternatif dillerde de sunulabilir. İrtibat için lütfen 02082238934 numaralı telefondan ulaşın.

اس معلومات کو متبادل شکل، جیسے، پڑھنے میں آسان یا بڑے حروف، میں دستیاب کرایا جا سکتا ہے، اور درخواست کرنے پر اسے متبادل زبان میں بھی دستیاب کرایا جا سکتا ہے۔ براہ مہربانی 02082238934 پر رابطہ کریں۔

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**Barts Health**  
NHS Trust

Patient information

## Having a tissue expander

**It is important that you read and understand the information contained in this leaflet before you sign a consent form**

Department of Plastic Surgery  
2nd Floor John Harrison House  
Royal London Hospital  
London E1 1BB

020 3594 7192 or 020 3594 7195



## Introduction

You have been given this leaflet because it has been suggested that you need a tissue expander.

For most people having a tissue expander is very successful, although there are risks which this leaflet explains. It also tells you what to expect when you come in for your operation and what to do when you go home.

We will try to make your hospital stay as pleasant as possible. If you have any queries after reading this leaflet please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff.

## What is a tissue expander

A tissue expander is like a balloon which is inserted into the body, just under the level of the skin. Once inserted, the Plastic Surgeons can gradually fill the balloon over time with saline to increase its size. By doing this it allows the skin to expand or grow so that it can be used to cover areas of the body that have been damaged or have been treated for cancer such as breast reconstruction, traumatic accidents and birth defects.

The Expander is made from silicone and has a small tube connected to it called a port by which saline is injected into it. The amount of fluid and the time it takes to expand the skin will depend on what type of body defect is being treated and its size.

You can expect to have the tissue expander in place for up to several weeks.

## Returning to work

Your surgeon will tell you when you should be able to return to work however you should remember that tissue expander inflation can take several weeks before enough skin is needed to cover your defect.

If you need a doctor's certificate please tell the surgeon or ward staff or see your GP. Any follow on doctors certificates can be obtained from your GP.

## Driving

Depending on where your tissues expander is located, you may be advised to abstain from driving your car. However if you need to drive you are strongly advised to notify DVLA and your insurance company as they may decline to offer you protection unless they have been previously notified

## Contact Numbers

Ward 12C 020 359 41210  
Ward 3D 020 359 41320

### **Lead Nurse for Plastic Surgery**

**Daren Edwards** – 020 7377 7000 Ext 46031 / bleep 1194  
Daren.edwards@bartshealth.nhs.uk

### **Clinical Nurse Specialist**

**Siobhan Moriarty** – 07709134148 / bleep 1022  
Siobhan.moriarty@bartshealth.nhs.uk

## Leaving Hospital

Once your wound has settled and the drain(s) removed you will be discharged home. You will need to make arrangements with friends or family to collect you from hospital; hospital transport is only available in special circumstances. Ideally you should arrange for someone to stay with you on your first night home.

Before you leave hospital you will be given a small magnet by your consultant; this is for the nurses in the clinic to find the port in your expander. You will need to bring this with you to every follow up appointment.

You will be given an outpatient appointment to be seen in the Nurse Led Clinic at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel. Your first appointment is usually a week after your discharge. If your wound has not completely healed you may be asked to come back sooner or the nursing staff will arrange for you to be followed up by the District Nurse or Practice Nurse at your GP surgery.

You may feel some discomfort each time the saline fluid is injected into the expander. How much is put in depends on your level of tolerance and the amount of skin needed to stretch. In normal circumstances it can take weekly visits over a period of several weeks to get enough skin to cover your defect. Once this has been achieved you will be given a date to return to hospital for the removal of your expander and reconstructive surgery to take place.

## Will I need an anaesthetic?

The operation will be performed under a local or general anaesthetic.

Under a local anaesthetic the area where the expander is placed will be “frozen” with medication so that you will feel no pain. Local anaesthetic can be used alone, so that you stay awake during the operation, or you can be given a sedative as well to help you relax and feel sleepy.

For more major operations a general anaesthetic is needed and you will be asleep for the whole procedure.

The length of time the operation takes and the number of days you will be in hospital afterwards will depend on the size and location of the expander and your general health. Your plastic surgeon will discuss this with you before your operation.

## What happens before the operation?

You may be asked to come into hospital to a pre-admission clinic so that we can find out your medical history, review your medicines and carry out tests and investigations. These may include taking a sample of your blood, a chest x-ray and an ECG (heart recording). At the pre-admission clinic please do ask any questions you may have about the procedure.

## What happens during the operation?

During the operation the expander is placed under the skin in the area that has been chosen by the surgeons and filled with saline fluid. It is filled to a certain level. The injection site or Port is kept away from the balloon itself and then the skin is closed over it.

## What are the risks of tissue expansion?

The use of expanders has some very good results but as with any operation there is a small risk of infection and complications. The following are unlikely but you should be aware that they may occur.

### **Infection and wound breakdown**

As with any surgical procedure there is a risk of infection and wound breakdown. In this case you would need antibiotics and dressings and the wound may take longer to heal. In severe cases such as a deep wound or abscess formation the expander would have to be removed.

### **Leakage from the expander**

In rare cases the expander can sometimes break open or rupture. When this happens the expander is removed as it can't be inflated anymore. The saline that has been used to inflate the expander is harmless and is usually reabsorbed by the body very quickly. However, should the expander rupture then you will need a further operation to remove it.

### **Bleeding**

Sometimes there can be a buildup of blood surrounding the site called a haematoma. Although most haematomas are reabsorbed by the body sometimes another operation may be needed to remove it.

## What happens after the operation?

Staff will monitor you in the recovery area of theatre until it is clinically safe for you to return to the ward. When you are back on the ward the staff will check your wounds and blood pressure regularly. You may find you have a drip in your arm to replace any fluid you have lost during your operation; if you have not eaten or drunk anything for a while you will need extra fluids.

Following your operation you may experience pain and swelling. It is normal to have swelling, bruising and discomfort in the area where the tissue expander is placed. You will be prescribed painkillers and your pain level will be regularly assessed – please tell the staff if you are in pain or feel sick when you return to the ward. Taking painkillers regularly can stop pain from becoming severe and allow you to get up and walk around more easily. You will be told when you can get out of bed.

You will have a small dressing placed over the site of your tissue expander port for the first few days after which it can be removed. You may also have one or more drains around your wound site. This allows any excess blood and fluid away from your wound.

The surgeon will visit you after your operation or on the following day and if you are staying in hospital for several days you will receive a daily visit.