

# Breast prosthesis and bra information



## **This information sheet provides practical information about prostheses (artificial breast forms) for women who have had breast surgery.**

A breast prosthesis is a breast form that can fit in a bra to make your breasts look natural and balanced. The prosthesis can replace the whole breast (mastectomy) or a part of the breast after a wide local excision (lumpectomy, breast-conserving surgery and partial mastectomy). Breast reconstruction surgery can also be discussed with your surgeon.

Most breast prostheses are made from soft silicone gel encased in a thin film. They are made in the shape of a women's breast or part of a breast. The outer surface is soft and smooth and may have a nipple outline.

## **The first few weeks after surgery**

Initially you will be given a soft fabric, temporary prosthesis to pin in your clothing.

The soft prosthesis has a filling that you can adjust to make it look right for you. At this time you may wish to pin the temporary prosthesis into a camisole or a light, soft, stretchy bra.

Your Breast Care Nurse will give you advice on when you are ready to get a permanent prosthesis, (usually 6 to 10 weeks after surgery). Your surgeon or breast care nurse will provide you with a Breast Prosthesis Benefit Form to start your breast prosthesis service payment.

The Breast Prosthesis Service Payment is made by the New Zealand Ministry of Health. Breast prosthesis payment is for people who have had:

- a mastectomy (either one or both breasts)
- a wide local excision or
- reconstructive surgery (removal of the reconstructed breast or a reconstructed breast that does not provide a balance with the other breast).

The payments are to reduce the cost of buying breast prostheses and bras.

The Ministry of Health will pay this service payment to either you, or the supplier can claim for you. For details on how to make a personal claim, see the Ministry of Health brochure "What you need to know about Breast Prosthesis Service Payments".

This brochure is available from the Ministry of Health or, by contacting your local Cancer Society on **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.

## **How you can claim this funding**

You can claim if you are a New Zealand citizen or you are normally a resident in New Zealand. Your specialist or GP will give you a current medical certificate with your NHI number, and details of your need for a breast prosthesis or prostheses. Your entitlement is for \$613.33 per side every four years.

## **What your entitlement can be used for**

Your entitlement can be used for:

- breast prosthesis (breast form). These include standard breast forms, swim form, foam filler, or a shell prosthesis.
- bras, including special bras to hold a prosthesis, surgical bras and normal bras.
- modifications to bras to accommodate a prosthesis.
- prosthetic nipples.

## **Value for money**

Breast prostheses vary in price. The same prosthesis purchased from different suppliers can vary considerably in cost.

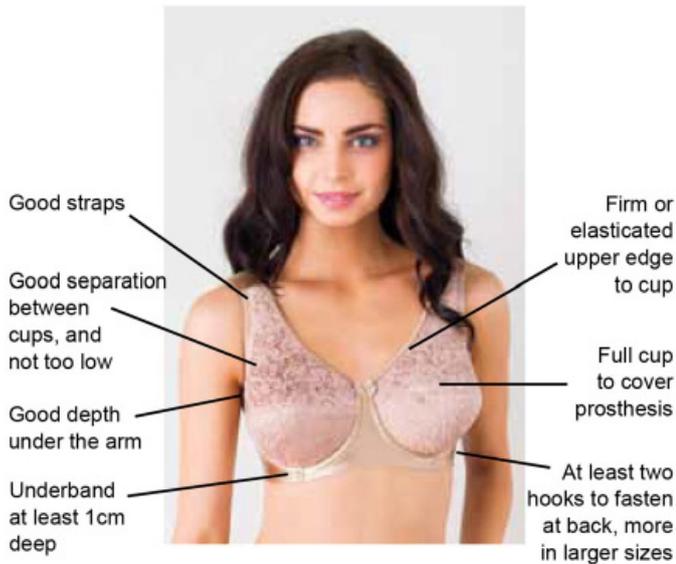
## **A suitable bra**

There are many styles of bras suitable to wear with a prosthesis. A prosthesis bra/mastectomy bra has a pocket. The prosthesis can be slipped into the pocket (usually from the side).

If you already have a bra that fits well and has all the features shown below, you may not need to buy a new one. Your prosthesis fitter can check your bra and give

you guidance. You may also wish to talk about sewing a pocket into your bra with the fitter.

If your bra is not suitable, you will find it helpful to be properly measured and fitted before buying a new one.



## Fitting a prosthesis

When purchasing a prosthesis you should expect from your trained fitter:

- privacy
- to be able to see yourself in a mirror so you can check how the prosthesis looks in your bra and clothing
- a selection of products
- enough time to make the right choice
- sensitivity to your needs and concerns
- a prosthesis that feels comfortable and gives you a good shape.

You may wish to take a friend or relative along. When going for your first fitting, remember to take your medical certificate along.

When being fitted for your prosthesis you need to:

- either take a well-fitting bra or be fitted for a suitable bra at the same time.

- wear a plain, light, fitted top. This will help you to choose a prosthesis that gives you a good shape.
- lean forwards towards the mirror to ensure there is no significant gap between the prosthesis and your chest wall.

## Prostheses

Prostheses come in a variety of shapes, sizes and skin tones. You should be able to find a prosthesis to suit you. Silicone prostheses come in full weight—about the same as a natural breast—or a light weight, which can be 15 percent to 35 percent lighter. It is important to discuss the best option for you with your fitter.



**Partial prosthesis**—for women who have only had part of the breast removed. It will fill out the breast outline.

**Shell prosthesis**—a soft shell of silicone that fits over the breast to help match the size and contour of the opposite breast.

**Swim prosthesis**—women may be advised to wear a swim prosthesis so that their silicone prosthesis is not damaged by chlorine or salt water and sand.

**Nipple prosthesis**—these can be stuck onto a breast prosthesis or a breast reconstruction.

Care recommendations come with each prosthesis.

**Manufacturer's warranty**—your prosthesis will have a warranty. The length of the warranty will be on the warranty card.

## Handy suggestions

Tops with a gathered centre seam give the appearance of breasts. This can be useful if you have a bilateral mastectomy and wish only to wear soft prostheses or no prostheses at all.



*Source: EziBuy New Zealand*

Many women buy regular swimwear and stitch in a swim prosthesis.

For more information about the subjects raised in this information sheet, visit the Cancer Society website ([www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)) or [www.breastcancercare.org.uk](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk)