

Psychology services for patients considering risk-reducing mastectomy

Everyone who is considering risk-reducing mastectomy (RRM) to help reduce their cancer risk is referred to see a clinical psychologist for support during the process.

Why have I been asked to see a clinical psychologist?

The decision to have RRM can be complex involving many factors, and the surgery can be long. Sometimes decisions need to be made quickly and the timing of surgery can be important. Your consultants will explain about different types of surgery, risks and complications. You will have been asked whether you would like to have breast reconstruction. Making decisions about surgery while coping with new information, anxiety and the unknown can be challenging. Clinical psychologists help people make sense of the information available.

Decision-making

RRM can feel like a big step to take. On the other hand, deciding can be easy. You may have already decided what to do. If deciding is difficult, the clinical psychologist can guide you through the decision-making process. You do not have to make a decision immediately. You do have time.

What can I talk about?

You will have time to talk about your decisions with a neutral and non-judgemental person who is independent from your friends and family. We are a point of contact if there is nobody supportive nearby. If something unexpected happens, you will have met someone with the skills to support you.

Preparing for surgery and recovery

If you have read about or met women who have chosen RRM, the clinical psychologist can review your own expectations. They can discuss relationships and how you and your partner might feel after surgery by drawing on what has been learned from other couples.

The clinical psychologist can help you discuss the alternatives and support you in preparing for surgery (if you decide to have surgery). There will be other issues you will have had to cope with. These could include a cancer diagnosis, learning about your family history or additional cancer risks due to genetic test results, thinking about your reproductive choices and what BRCA means for your relatives. You may have feelings of loss or fear. You may also notice that choosing surgery brings out unexpected emotions or unfamiliar feelings in you or those nearest to you.

If you have experienced psychological problems in the past, it may be useful to think about how those experiences might impact positively or negatively on your ability to cope now. The clinical psychologist will encourage you to use your existing skills and strengths.

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes, you can bring anyone you want to the clinic. Some people find it useful to have their partner present to work out how the surgery will affect the relationship, jobs and finances, for example.

Will you try to change my mind?

No, this is not the case. Some patients do worry that the appointment will be like a 'test' or that they will have to convince the psychologist that they need surgery. The role of the psychologist is to ensure that you have considered all the issues that are relevant to you so that you make a safe decision.

What if I cannot decide?

You can take time to think about things after the session. If you would like to meet again or speak by phone, just ask.

Further support

We can tell you about local and online groups, or put you in contact with other women who have been through something similar. You may have counselling services linked to your GP surgery.

How is an appointment made?

You will be referred to the clinical psychologist after you have seen your surgeon or attended the BRCA Family Services Clinic. You may be seen in the clinic or separately. The appointment is usually 50 minutes long.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your genetics clinician on 020 7188 1364 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Cancer Genetics Service
Guy's Regional Genetics Service
Guy's Hospital
Great Maze Pond
London SE1 9RT

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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