

Seroma

A **seroma** is a collection of lymphatic fluid, with some blood cells, under the skin in the area of your surgical incision. This collection of fluid occurs in the space between the skin and the tissue where the surgery was performed. Seromas are the most common complication from breast surgery. They are more annoying than medically dangerous to patients.

A seroma occurs because the small lymphatic vessels were cut. These microscopic vessels spill their secretions into the area, creating a pooling of fluids. This occurs naturally following breast surgery; therefore, drains are usually put into the surgical area during surgery to collect the fluid. However, if small clots clog the drains, fluid will build up creating a seroma. Occasionally, an area in the incision does not seem to drain efficiently, even when the drains are working properly.

A seroma will feel much like a balloon filled with water. If you press down on the area, the fluid will move under your fingers. It is usually painless. However, if the fluid accumulates in the area of the incision, pressure on the incision line or a nerve can cause pain.

Treatments for seromas vary according to the amount of fluid or the pain caused by the accumulation. Your physician will evaluate the amount of fluid and your complaints of pain to

determine if aspiration is necessary. Fluid accumulation can increase the risk of infection in the area.

The fluid is removed in the surgeon's office. The procedure is slightly uncomfortable but is not painful. Fluid removal usually relieves any pain involved.

To remove the fluid the physician will:

- Cleanse the area with an antiseptic cleanser to reduce bacteria
- Insert a small needle attached to an empty syringe into the area
- Pull back on the plunger of the syringe to draw the fluid into the syringe
- Cover the aspirated area with a clean bandage

You will need to monitor the area for additional accumulation of fluid and for signs of infection. Report these problems to your healthcare provider. Aspiration of fluid is a simple procedure but, as with any other invasive procedure, it increases the risk of infection.

Seroma formation has **nothing** to do with your cancer, but is related to the amount of lymphatic fluid in the surgical area. When the area heals, these vessels will seal off. Fluid accumulation gradually diminishes, but some women have accumulation for weeks requiring repeated aspirations to remove the fluid.