

Breast Cancer Bag

For some time now, I have been in contact with Barbara, a lovely reader from New Zealand, and she told me about a special bag making project she has taken upon herself to achieve, in order to help other women in a time of need.

As Barbara wrote to me:

"I am trying to make some bags for the Breast Clinic to give to patients who have had a mastectomy and are sent home with drains in situ. Usually they are discharged with two drainage bottles attached to them, and they have to be held in a hospital pillow slip. So I am trying to make life more pleasant for the ladies by making these bags to carry the drainage bottles in. They are often in use for 2 - 3 months, and as there is about 3 of these operations per week I thought I could do that little job to make life a little more pleasant for someone else. I will try and incorporate the designs into bags but what I want is something simple and pleasing to the eye."

These figures are for one hospital in New Zealand, and as you can imagine, the numbers of these mastectomy operations are far higher worldwide. I have done some research into the situation here in Australia, and it seems that here too, patients are often sent home with their drainage bottles in a pillowcase, or worse – a plastic bag.



As you can imagine, this makes getting around fairly awkward, and even humiliating, and based on Barbara's suggestions on the bags she's been making for her Hospital in NZ, and also on suggestions from the Breast Care Nurse at one of the Hospitals in Melbourne, Australia, we have come up with a very simple bag design.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, we would love to ask all of our Readers to help out if you can. A couple of phone calls and an afternoon's sewing could make all the difference and help brighten the day of a Mother, Sister, Aunt or Cousin who's in need of a little pick-me-up.

If you can, **PLEASE** look at your local community and see if these easy-to-make bags would help. Contacts are different around the world, but we've found it best to call your local hospital and ask if they do breast cancer / mastectomy surgeries there. If they do, ask to speak with the Breast Care Nurse, and she will then be able to let you know their requirements for these drainage bags.

This is a worthwhile project that your guild might like to take on, on a more permanent basis as an ongoing community project. Every little bit helps, and your help will be so greatly appreciated.

Breast Cancer Bag Pattern

This bag pattern provided below is a one-size-fits-all, with an adjustable strap, so that it can be worn over the shoulder or diagonally across the body. This is important, to take the strain off shoulders and chest after this surgery. Having an open top also means that the bag can be worn cross body, with a shirt over the top, so the lady can walk around easily, and in public, without any worry over bottles or drainage tubes showing.

This bag is very easy to make, and will make such a difference to each woman who receives one in that it will help with her getting around after her surgery, and show that someone else cares enough to make a bag especially for her.



The bag is a simple, lined bag, with one long strap, and a loop to knot the strap on, so it is a fully adjustable, one-size-fits-all design. Each bag measures approx. 11 inches wide x 14 ½ inches high, and 3 inches deep. The strap is 55 inches long.

You Will Need:

½ metre (½ yard) fabric for bag outer and strap

½ metre (½ yard) fabric for bag lining

These amounts are minimum requirements – if you have spare fabric in your stash, or are able to make a few bags, please purchase 1- 1 ½ metres/yards and make as many as you can out of that amount of fabric.

** Please note too – Heavier weight fabric will be better for this bag, as each bag will need to hold two, 500 ml (approx. 1 pint) bottles, which can become heavy.

To Make:

From your bag outer fabric, cut 2 rectangles measuring 12 x 17 inches. Cut one rectangle measuring 3 x 5 inches for the tab, and a strip measuring 2 ½ inches wide x 56 inches long for the strap. (You may need to join two shorter lengths for this.)

From the lining fabric, cut two rectangles measuring 12 x 17 inches also.

To make the bag, simply place the bag outer rectangles right sides together, and sew down the long side seams and across the bottom.

To form the base, pinch together the bottom corners – align the side seam on top of the bottom seam, mark down 1 ½ inches from the sewn corner point and sew across that line at right angles to the other seams. Repeat for the other corner. Turn bag right sides out.

The finished size of the tab is 1 ¼ inches wide. Fold the rectangle in half with right sides together, and sew down the 5 inch length with a ¼ inch seam. Turn the tube right sides out and fold over in half. The tab is positioned on one side of the bag outer, close to the side seam, and the strap is on the other side of the bag, close to the opposite side seam.

Matching raw edges, sew the folded tab to the bag outer (1/2 inch from the side seam) with a scant seam.

To make the strap, fold in half down the length of the strip and tuck in the ¼ inch seam allowances. Pin and sew, remembering to also tuck in the raw edges on one end of the strip. As you did for the tab, sew the raw edge of the bag strap to the other side of the bag outer, approx ½ inch from the side seam.

Make your bag lining in the same way as you did the bag outer, taking care to leave most of the middle of one side seam open to turn the bag through later.

Put the bag outer into the lining bag, tuck the tab and strap between the two layers and sew around the top of the bags. Turn the bag right sides out through the hole left in the lining and topstitch that hole closed. Push the lining into the bag and topstitch around the top edge to finish the bag off neatly.

Please Note:

- The more individual these bags are, the better! Use up your scraps – it doesn't matter if the sides are different colours – it all adds character. Piece together some different fabrics for fun, or do as we did, and cut a pretty panel to sew on one side of the bag. Maybe use a leftover patchwork block to decorate one side?
- You may like to add some machine embroidery, or personalise your gift with a short message. "Good Luck" or "Made with love/care by (Your Name)" would be lovely.
- It is REALLY IMPORTANT too that you only make these bags when you are healthy yourself. As these women are quite probably having chemotherapy as well, their resistance is low, and any cold or flu germs could be quite drastic for them.
- We, and these women, do really appreciate your support with this bag making appeal – Thank you for making the effort to help.

