
PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET ABOUT POST BREAST SURGERY PHYSIOTHERAPY

The breast care exercise booklet will have been provided by your physiotherapist or specialist nurse. We advise to do these exercises as per booklet and clinician guidance. Aim to do x 5-10 of each exercise x 3 times a day gently and not pushing into pain.

How will doing exercises help me?

- Exercises can help prevent shoulder stiffness and help you to regain the movement you had before your surgery. They can improve your arm movement so you are prepared for further treatment should you need it.
- These exercises can help to ease tightness caused by tight scars and cording (a tight cord sensation running down your arm).
- Reduce the risk of lymphoedema

What exercises do you recommend?

Post Mastectomy or Axillary Node Clearance (Nodes under the armpit) or Lateral Intercostal Artery Perforator (LICAP/AICAP) Surgery or flap reconstruction.

- **Stage 1 - warm up and basic exercises in your booklet** - start doing these **the day after your operation**. Keep your arm below shoulder level for the first week. No excessive reaching forwards/backwards or pushing down with the operated side.
- **Stage 2 - more advanced exercises in your booklet** - start doing these exercises **one week after your operation if your drains have been removed**.

Expander or reconstruction patients with or without Axillary Node Clearance

- **Stage 1-warm up and basic exercises in your booklet** - start doing these **the day after your operation**. Keep your arm below shoulder level for the first week. No excessive reaching forwards/backwards or pushing down with the operated side.
- **Stage 2- more advanced exercises in your booklet** - start doing these exercises **one week after your operation. Sideways wall climbing to be commenced after three weeks if your drains have been removed**.

Latissimus Dorsi flap reconstruction patients with or without Axillary Node Clearance

- **Stage 1-warm up and basic exercises in your booklet** - start doing these **the day after your operation**. Keep your arm below shoulder level for the

first four weeks. No excessive reaching forwards/backwards or pushing down with the affected side.

- **Stage 2-more advanced exercises in your booklet** - start doing these exercises after **four weeks after your operation if your drains have been removed.**

Complete the exercises slowly and gently. You should feel a gentle stretching or pulling sensation when you are doing these exercises but not sharp pain. You may find it helpful to take painkillers thirty minutes before you do them. Follow the instructions that come with the painkillers and do not take more than the recommended dose.

If you are having radiotherapy please continue with the exercises daily during treatment, even if you have full movement. It is recommended to also perform your exercises daily for six to eighteen months following radiotherapy, even if you have full movement.

When should I stop doing the exercises?

Stop the exercises if you develop a seroma (a build-up of fluid in the breast, chest wall or back) a wound infection or healing problems or experience greater pain during or pain continues after you have finished the exercises.

Can I do housework and general exercise?

For the first six weeks after your operation we advise you to use your unaffected arm for repetitive tasks. You can use your affected arm for light activities such as dusting and washing up as soon as you return home and it feels comfortable to do so. You can then gradually increase the tasks you do with your affected arm.

It is important to maintain your general fitness by doing activities such as walking. You can start swimming again six weeks after your surgery if your wound has healed. Do not swim if you are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy.

If you want to return to the gym, please discuss this with your doctor, physiotherapist or breast care nurse beforehand. The active against cancer service offer several types of exercise classes and pre and post-surgery assessments. Please visit activeagainstcancer.org.uk for more details.

What changes should I expect after my surgery?

- It is common to have swelling and bruising around your wound. This is part of the healing process.
- You may notice some changes in your skin sensation – such as tingling, pins and needles, numbness or extra sensitivity, at your operation site, under your arm and in the inner part of your upper arm. This is caused by damage to very fine nerve endings in, and underneath, your skin. This should settle down over

the next few months, although some patients may find they are left with some permanent numbness or altered sensation.

- Fluid called 'serum' may collect under your wound within a few days of your operation and this is a normal part of healing. The fluid should reabsorb over a few weeks and should not stop you from doing your exercises in the early weeks. If the seroma continues and is enlarged please stop doing your exercises and inform your consultant, nurse or physiotherapist for further treatment and guidance.

Are there any other changes I should be aware of?

- **Cording** Some women develop what feels like a tight band or cord running from their armpit to their hand. Cording may limit your arm movement and can be painful. You can relieve the symptoms by doing your exercises. If the cording is not relieved by your exercises, please contact the physiotherapist.
- Some women develop swelling in their arm months or years after breast surgery. This might be **lymphoedema**. Your breast care nurse or physiotherapist will discuss this with you and advise you about how to minimise the risk.

Is there anything else I can do to help improve my arm movement?

- Once your wound has healed fully, gently massage it to help reduce any sensitivity, tightness and aid healing. This will relieve any tightness and help you to move your arm more easily.
- Be aware of your posture. It is natural to hunch forward to avoid stretching your wound. But this type of poor posture can make your muscles tight and prevent you from moving your arm properly as well as increasing your pain. Try to keep your shoulders level and avoid slouching.

When can I start driving again?

- We advise you to not drive for four to six weeks after your operation. Please speak to your doctor or clinical specialist breast care nurse at your clinic appointment before you start driving again. It is also worth checking with your insurance company. You are not exempt from wearing a seatbelt.

Who can I contact with queries or concerns?

- Specialist Breast Care Nurse: 01423 553 398 (Mon-Fri 9-5pm)
- Women's and Men's Health Physiotherapist: 01423 553472 (Mon-Fri 8.30-4.30pm)