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**Laparoscopic Surgery – Breast Surgery**

**Advice and  
exercise  
following  
breast surgery**



## **Section 1: Advice**

### **Breathing exercises post-surgery**

Following surgery it is also important to exercise your lungs as the effects of anaesthetic and prolonged periods of lying in one position can suppress your breathing. Breathing exercises will help prevent chest infections and help return your lungs to full function.

Every hour you should:

- Take three deep breaths. Breathe as deeply as possible, hold the breath for 2-3 seconds, and then slowly breathe out.
- Perform 3 "Huffs". Take a medium breath in and breathe out forcefully through a round mouth, as if you are steaming up a window.
- Cough and clear your lungs.

### **Recommended daily activities**

After your surgery you may find it difficult to use the arm on your operated side, this is quite normal and to be expected. You should try and use this arm as normally as possible, however to prevent delay to wound healing some activities should be avoided. It is important to find a balance between protecting your affected arm and using it as fully as possible.

#### **Safe activities (first 2-4 weeks)**

- Washing
- Dressing
- Eating/drinking
- Light housework (washing up, meal preparation and dusting)

#### **Activities to avoid (first 2-4 weeks)**

- Lifting heavy objects – shopping, children. Pushing or pulling heavy objects – furniture. Repetitive movements that may rub wound – ironing, vacuuming. Excessive reaching – reaching to top shelves, pegging out Washing

### **Returning to physical activities**

- Walking: This is a good form of exercise that will help maintain / regain health after surgery and general anaesthetic. Start with short daily walks and gradually increase the distance.
- Gym/Exercise: It is safe to exercise your legs and unaffected arm as soon as you feel able. You may start to lift light weights with your affected arm after 4 weeks. Remember to progress slowly and listen to your body.
- Swimming: It is safe to start swimming when your wound has healed, usually after 3-4 weeks.



- General physical sports: These can be commenced at about 6 weeks.
- Sexual activity: It can be resumed once you feel comfortable.

### **Driving and travelling by car**

Resuming driving:

- This is safe to do so when your wound has healed and you have regained full movement in your arm (about 3 weeks)
- Practice in a quiet area to ensure you have the full movement and confidence required
- You may wish to place a small folded towel between yourself and the seatbelt to prevent soreness.

### **Skin protection**

If you have had lymph nodes removed or a course of radiotherapy to the axilla (arm pit) it is very important to protect the skin on the arm and hand on the affected side.

This should include:

- Moisturising the skin daily; use non-perfumed, aqueous based cream
- Wearing gloves to protect you from scratches when gardening or washing up and doing similar activities
- Avoid having blood pressure/blood samples taken from the arm on your operated side
- Taking the above precautions will reduce the risk of infection and injury to the arm.

### **Lymphoedema**

It is also important to check your arm/hand for signs of swelling (lymphoedema). There is a small risk that this can occur immediately following surgery or radiotherapy or many years after.

### **Scar care**

When your wound has healed it is important to look after the scar to avoid it adhering. Massage along and either side of the scar with an aqueous, non-perfumed moisturiser. Try to do this three times a day.



## **Section 2: Exercise**

In the first few weeks post-surgery it is important to find a balance between protecting your affected arm and using it normally. Exercise is important to prevent joint stiffness and restore full shoulder movement.

### **Who are the exercises suitable for?**

The exercises are suitable for people who have had:

- breast surgery
- lymph node removal
- radiotherapy

You may experience some discomfort during and after exercising; this is normal and shows that you are progressing and stretching. However, the exercises should not be painful. If you are experiencing too much pain it may be that your medication needs to be altered. If you have ongoing problems with pain, please discuss with us.

### **When to stop?**

Stop doing the exercises and contact us as soon as possible if you have:

- a seroma (a collection of fluid under the arm or in the breast or chest wall)
- wound infection or healing problems
- pain that gets worse during these exercises, or continues once you've finished them

### **How long should I continue doing the exercises?**

If you've just had surgery, keep doing the exercises until you've got back the range of movement you had before your operation. Continue doing the exercises if you're going to have radiotherapy as they will help your shoulder flexibility. If you've had radiotherapy, it's a good idea to do the exercises for as long as you're still feeling tightness and stiffness. Arm stiffness and weakness can occur long after surgery and radiotherapy so you may want to continue doing the exercises after this.



## Exercise guidance

Week	Aim	Guidance
One	Elbow to shoulder level  Start to use your arm as normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- In week one you should exercise <b>“little and often”</b> (5-6 times a day).</li><li>- Start with 5-10 repetitions and gradually build up to 15-20.</li><li>- Always start with the warm-up exercises and try to perform both early and advanced exercises.</li><li>- Some of the advanced exercises may be too difficult initially but you can progress onto these as the days go on.</li></ul>
Two	Stretching above shoulder level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- In week two you should exercise for more regular, longer periods (3-4 times a day)</li><li>- Always start with the warm-up exercises.</li><li>- When performing the exercises concentrate on stretching the shoulder more.</li><li>- Do 15-20 repetitions at a time.</li></ul>
Three - Four	Full range of movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- If you have good/nearly full range of movement in your shoulder, performing the set of full stretches twice a day will be sufficient.</li><li>- If you still have movement to regain, continue with the warm-up exercises and concentrate on the advanced stretches to achieve the last of the joint movement.</li></ul>

source: <https://www.nuh.nhs.uk/physiotherapy>



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## Warm-up exercises

**Warm-up exercises:** should be performed during the first two days following your surgery and thereafter in preparation to perform the more advanced exercises.

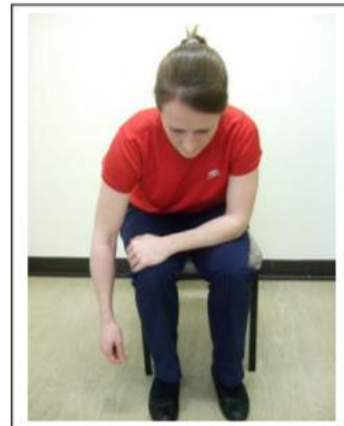
### Hand pumping

Squeeze and relax your hand to increase circulation. This can be done with a ball, pair of socks or corner of a pillow.



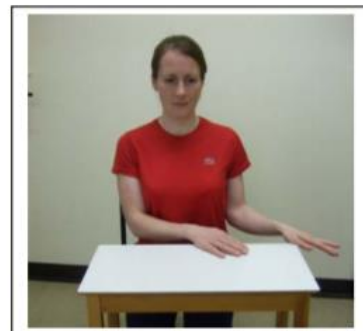
### Arm swing

Sitting on the edge of your chair with your chest close to your knees, allow your arm to swing freely. Swing your arm forwards and backwards, side to side and in a circle, gradually increasing the size of the circle.



### Dusting exercise

Sit at a table with your hand resting on it. Keeping your elbow tucked in by your side move your hand from side to side (as if dusting).



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### Shoulder rotation

Gently roll your shoulders forward and backwards concentrating on maintaining a good posture.



### Early stage exercises

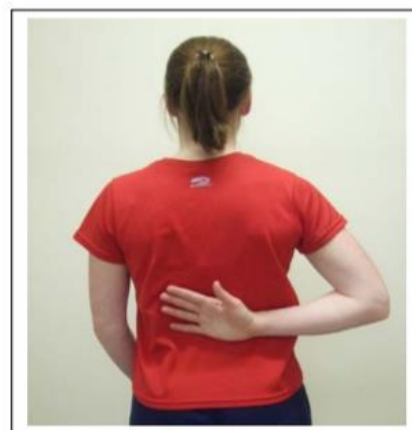
#### Patting the back of your head

Use your whole hand to pat the back of your head (keeping your head in the centre). Take your elbow out to the side as far as you can. This is an important position to achieve if you are to receive radiotherapy.



#### Back reach

Slowly reach your hand behind and up the middle of your back.



source: <https://www.nuh.nhs.uk/physiotherapy>



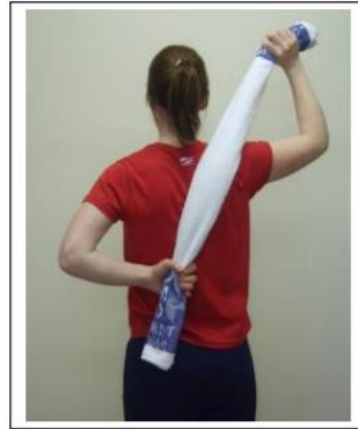
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### Back drying

Hold a towel in two hands as if you are drying your back. Swap your hands over.



### Trunk rotation

Lying on your back bend your knees up and slowly lower them to the bed. Repeat on both sides.



### Assisted arm raises –

#### Exercise 1

Hold the wrist of the arm on the side you have had the surgery and lift your arm upwards.



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## Advanced exercises

### Assisted arm raise -

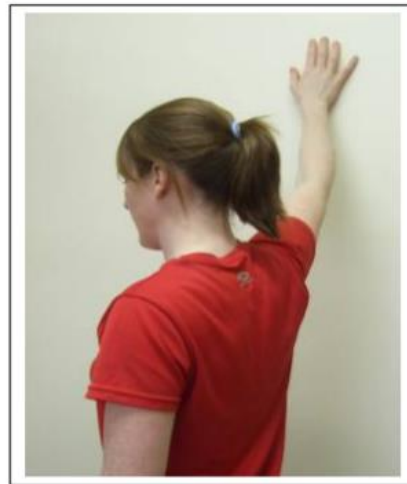
#### Exercise 2

Clasp both hands together in front of you and begin to raise your hands towards the ceiling, keeping your elbows relatively straight. Your “good” arm assists your affected one.



### Wall climbing – forward and to side

Facing the wall put your hands on the wall at shoulder level. Slowly walk both your hands up towards the ceiling. Use your “good” arm as an incentive to guide the affected one.



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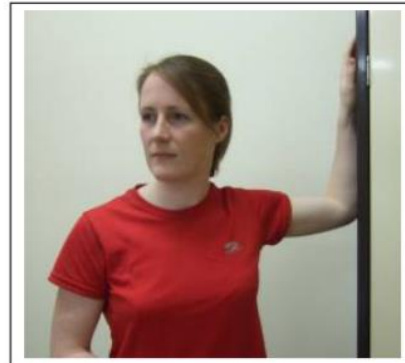
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### Chest stretch

Standing with your forearm against a door frame at shoulder height, turn your chest away from the door frame so you feel the stretch in your chest and shoulder.



### Lying down stretch

Lying on your back put your hands under your head with your elbows pointing to the ceiling, slowly lower your elbows to the bed.



### Final exercise

Continuing from the above position, clasp your hands above your head and stretch upwards.



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