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Exercises after Sustaining a burn to your shoulder or arm

Physiotherapy Department

Exercises after sustaining a burn to your shoulder/arm

Following a burn to your shoulder you may experience pain and swelling. This may cause problems with work, dressing, eating etc.

This leaflet has been designed to inform you regarding your injury and instruct you on appropriate exercises.

Treatment of your burn:

- You will attend the burns dressing room for assessment and treatment.
- You will have bulky dressings/bandages at first which will become less bulky as the burn heals.
- White Flamazine cream may be applied to your burn, it is a commonly-used cream to treat and prevent infections at the site of burns.

Depending on the severity of the burn you may be required to attend regularly for dressing changes until the burn has healed.

You will see a physiotherapist for appropriate exercises to maintain your movement and function.

Pain management

You may have been prescribed painkillers by the doctor. Ensure that you take these regularly. If you were not prescribed any painkillers, then take your normal painkillers regularly. Your exercises may increase your pain as you are stretching the burnt area, so ensure that you have had adequate pain relief throughout the day.

Advice

As a burn heals the skin becomes tight and can restrict your movement unless it is maintained in a good position and exercised regularly whilst it is healing.

Physiotherapy exercises will be provided to prevent tightening and restriction and encourage normal activity and function.

Positioning

Your most comfortable position will be where your wound/skin is not being stretched. This will however lead to longer term problems with restricted movement and loss of function.

The ideal position whilst your burn is healing is with your arm supported out to the side where your skin is stretched. This can be achieved with pillows as illustrated:

FIGURE 1:



You may if necessary see an Occupational Therapist who will measure and make you a splint to maintain the arm in a good position to be worn as in figure 2.

This position will help to maintain the movement and prevent the skin tightening whilst the burn heals. you may have a similar splint.

It will either be bandaged or strapped into position and the aim is to keep your arm supported out to the side to keep a constant stretch on the burn. Use the splint as directed by your Occupational Therapist.

FIGURE 2:



If your elbow is involved and at risk of becoming tight you may have a different splint made by your Occupational Therapist which will hold your forearm in a straightened position.

If you do require a splint you will be assessed and treated by an

Occupational Therapist who will produce an appropriate splint for your needs.

Physiotherapy

Repeat each exercise 10 times every hour during the day.

The first few exercises will be painful; this is normal and will not cause you any harm. Keep going with the exercises as they will get easier.



Exercise 1.

Start with your arm at your side, lead with your thumb and raise your arm from your side as far as you can towards the ceiling. Then lower back down to your side.

Then do both arms together



Exercise 2.

Start with your arm at your side, stretch your arm out in front of you and up towards the ceiling. Then lower it.

Then do both arms together.



Exercise 3.

Stretch your arm out and reach behind your head. Stretch your hand down to the base of your neck



Exercise 4.

Take your hand behind your back and slide it up the centre of your back towards your shoulder blade as far as you can, then relax.



Exercise 5.

Start with your arm out straight and bend your elbow up as far as you can, to get your hand to touch your shoulder, then lower.



Exercise 6.

Stretch your arm out in front of you to lock your elbow out straight. Then relax.

Helping your arm

It is vital to do your exercises first thing in the morning as you will find this is the worst time of day for joint stiffness as you have not been moving your shoulder whilst asleep.

If your arm is weak you can use your good arm to assist each movement

Stretching your arm

If the skin on your shoulder feels tight you can use your good arm to give an extra push at the end of each exercise and hold for a slow count of 10. Then repeat 10 times.

Your physiotherapist may provide you with further stretching exercises.

If you have any other problems or burns involving other joints, then your physiotherapist may also provide you with further exercises to target those specific areas.

Now that you have completed your exercises you will feel your shoulder is more relaxed. It is important to keep your arm and shoulder moving normally throughout the day as it will stiffen-up very quickly between each session.

You need to carry out day-to-day activities as normally as possible, for example brushing hair, dressing, preparing meals, etc.

You can stop doing your exercises when:

- Exercising is very easy.
- You are using your arm and shoulder normally throughout the day.

As your burn heals, your dressings will be reduced. The healed area will need an amount of regular creaming with a non perfumed cream.

Surgery

If your burn is deep and not healing of its own accord, you may require surgery. This may involve a skin graft which means taking skin from another area of your body and covering the burnt area to allow it to heal. If you do require surgery you will need to stop your exercises for a period of time until your graft is first checked by your surgeon; around five to seven days after your surgery. Your physiotherapist will then recommence your exercise programme and provide any further exercises required.

If you have any problems with these exercises such as increasing swelling or pain, then do not hesitate to contact us on 01792 703984 or your Burns doctor via Burns Dressing room telephone on 703821 between 9.00am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday or Powys Ward on 01792 703624 outside these times.

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