



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg
University Health Board

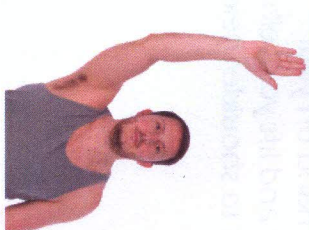
Patient information and advice following your Axillary (armpit) Node Dissection

Physiotherapy Services

Later Exercises:

Exercise 6:

Gently raise your arm up, as far as you are able and then lower slowly. You may find this easier lying on your back.



Exercise 7:

Gently raise your arm up and out to the side parallel with your body, aiming to reach to the side of your head and then lower slowly



Contact Details

If you would like to speak to the physiotherapist or have any questions about this leaflet please contact:

Burns and Plastic Surgery Physiotherapy
01792 703984 Monday-Friday 08:00-16:00

First Published August 2017

Review Date April 2021

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You have recently had surgery to remove all or some of the lymph nodes in your armpit (axilla). This leaflet contains information and advice about exercises, lymphoedema and returning to daily activities. This information will aid recovery from your operation and provide general advice for the care of your arm following the operation.

Why should I exercise?

It is important to exercise your arm following your operation in order to regain your full range of movement.

You may find that these movements have become limited following your surgery and this is often due to swelling, discomfort, clips and the positioning of drains in your skin. Exercise will help to regain your range of movement, help reduce swelling and prevent pain and stiffness.

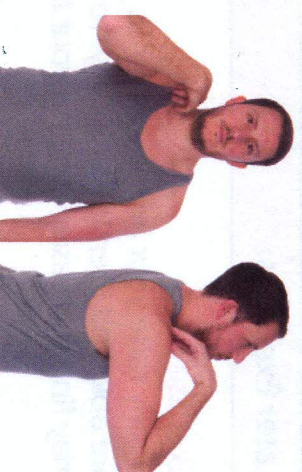
What exercises should I be doing?

Most people benefit from simple exercises. The exercises on page 4 are recommended for you to start after your operation. They have been designed to help decrease the risks of you developing:

- Shoulder weakness
- Tightness of the skin, muscle and scar which can limit shoulder movement
- Swelling in the arm

Exercise 3:

Put your hand on your shoulder and lift your elbow forwards to shoulder height.



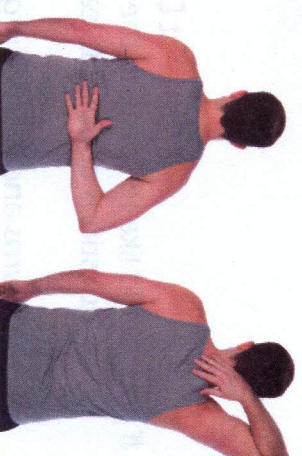
Exercise 4:

Put your hand on your shoulder and lift your elbow to the side to shoulder height. Finally, stretch your arm out straight from this position



Exercise 5:

Gently try and reach your hand behind your back and then behind your neck as far as possible and slowly return to your side.



Once your drains have been removed you need to progress onto the following exercises:

Sport/Leisure: Once your scars have healed and you have good movement you may begin swimming after six weeks. Most other leisure activities can be started within two or three months.

If you have any questions or are unsure always ask your surgeon or physiotherapist.

Early Exercises

It is important to move and exercise your arm gently following your operation. A physiotherapist will explain and demonstrate these exercises.

These exercises are safe to perform even if you have drains, clips or stitches in place.

**Exercises should be completed 3 times a day.
Repeat each exercise 5 times**

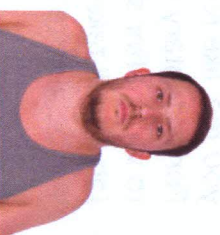
Exercise 1:

Sit or stand with good posture, turn your head to the left, hold for 3 seconds and then turn to the right and repeat.



Exercise 2:

Begin with your shoulders relaxed; bring your shoulders upwards towards your ears



How often do I have to exercise?

These exercises should be performed 3 times a day. Repeat each exercise 5 times.

Arm stiffness and tightness can occur long after surgery or if you have to undergo radiotherapy. It is important to continue doing these exercises until you have regained the range of movement you had before your operation.

What should I feel when performing these exercises?

It is normal to feel a stretching sensation and slight discomfort when performing these exercises. This feeling should ease as you repeat your exercises. It may be advisable for you to take some painkillers 30 minutes before you start to exercise. However, if you start having pain or further discomfort seek medical advice.

What problems might I encounter following my surgery?

Scarring

Once healed, your operation will leave a scar which may initially feel uncomfortable and tight when you move your arm. This will ease as you repeat your exercises and continue to stretch this area.

Once your wound has healed fully, it is important to massage moisturising cream, for example, Double base or E45 cream on and around the scar area to keep it soft and flexible. This can help improve the appearance of the scar.

Sensation

It is quite common to experience numbness or tingling down the back of your arm and your incision line. This usually improves after a few months but in some cases it can persist and can be permanent.

Swelling

Whilst some swelling after surgery is to be expected, the removal of the deep lymph glands from your armpit means that your body has to adapt to this change. Usually your body will adapt to this change, however, sometimes residual swelling can occur, which is called lymphoedema. Unlike other swelling, lymphoedema can lead to changes in the tissue such as fibrosis (hardness) and an increased risk of infection.

What is the role of the lymph nodes?

Lymph nodes, which are sometimes referred to as lymph glands, are a number of very small rounded or bean-shaped nodules which are situated superficially under the skin and in deeper areas of the body. They are located in many places around the body, for example in the neck, groin and arm pit. The lymph node acts as a filter and plays an important part in the immune system (fighting infection) and also helps carry away any excess tissue fluid which drains back into the blood circulation.

If I do have residual swelling, what should I do?

If you have swelling that is not resolving please inform your doctor, physiotherapist or nurse and they can advise you appropriately.

In the meantime follow these steps to minimise your swelling:

- Moisturise your affected arm on a daily basis
- Exercise gently and regularly

When can I return to normal activities?

After six weeks your scar should be healed and you should be able to move quite comfortably. You need to increase gradually the amount of exercise you do until you are moving more or less normally.

There are no hard and fast rules as to when you can return to work, sports or hobbies. People heal differently and have differing amounts of energy. Remember to progress activities slowly and listen to your body.

Walking: Is a good exercise to maintain or improve health after an operation and short daily walks when you get home will help.

Driving: You must not drive until you have full control of a vehicle. This will usually take around six weeks. Do not drive unless you are well, alert and are able to take emergency action. It is advisable to check with your insurance company before you start driving.

Work: This will all depend on the type of job you do and if you will be receiving any further treatment. A basic rule is if you feel like returning to work you are probably ready. For sedentary type work you may feel ready to go back to work after six weeks but if you do a physically-active job, it will take longer. Your surgeon or physiotherapist will be able to advise you on this.