



Exercises after Breast Reconstruction with a Latissimus Dorsi Flap

Physiotherapy



This leaflet contains advice about exercise and returning to normal activities after your operation. Which will help you make a good recovery.

You have recently had surgery to reconstruct your breast using a muscle from your back. This procedure may be to reduce your risk of cancer, treat your cancer or after your cancer treatment.

The following exercises are recommended because they are known to reduce the risks of developing:

- **Shoulder stiffness or weakness**
- **Swelling in the arm (lymphoedema)**
- **Weakness of the shoulder blade muscles which can cause bad posture**

The Exercises

Early

These should begin the day after your operation.

Repeat each exercise five times and try to do each set two or three times a day on the affected arm.

Exercise 1

Shrug your shoulders up to your ears and then relax.

Exercise 2

Take 3 deep breaths in through your nose, hold for 5 seconds and breathe out through your mouth.

Exercise 3

Rest your hand on your shoulder and raise your affected arm forwards so that your elbow is at the same level as your shoulder and then lower slowly.



Exercise 4

Rest your hand on your shoulder but this time take your elbow out to the sides until it reaches the level of your shoulder and then lower slowly.



Some discomfort at the drain site can be expected when you do these exercises and doing them gently will not cause any damage.

Later Exercises

When your drains have been removed you can begin to progress your exercises.

Now is the time to gradually work towards full movement in your shoulder. A gentle stretching sensation around your new breast and scar is not harmful. In fact, this actually helps the scars to heal.

Exercise 1

Gently raise straight arms up and over your head if you are able and lower. You may find this easier to do lying on your back.



Exercise 2

Gently raise straight arms away from your side as far as you can and lower.

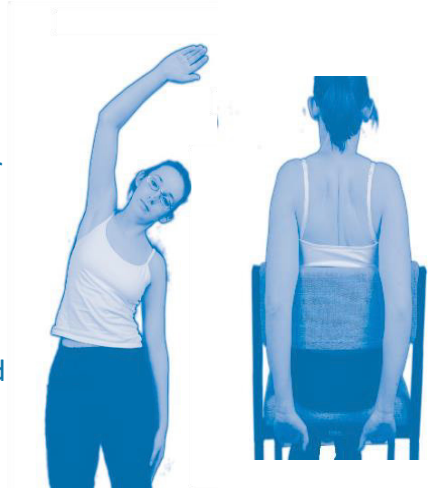


Exercise 3

Reach your hand slowly behind your back, as if doing up a bra.

Exercise 4

Lift your arm out from your side, then reach over your head towards the opposite side. Once you can do this easily, hold that position and lean your upper body to the same side.



Exercise 5

Place your hands behind your lower back. Gently extend the elbows behind you. This is drawing together your shoulder blades.



Exercise 6

Stretch your arm in front of your body and gently round your shoulder forwards. This is stretching your shoulder blade forwards a little around your chest.

Repeat each exercise five times, and each set several times during the day, until you have regained full movement in your shoulder. This may take several weeks to achieve.

It is normal to experience some discomfort after exercising, this shows that you are progressing and stretching. However, exercises should not be painful and they should be done gently. You may wish to take some painkillers 30 minutes before exercising.

Physical activity in general has a powerful effect on preventing certain cancers and reducing the chance of them returning. It is important you return to your normal level of activity and exercise after your operation, as soon as you can.

Your physiotherapist will be happy to help you achieve your activity goals or guide you with becoming more active safely. Consider the use of the Macmillan ‘Get active, feel good’ booklet to help set goals.

You will have a physiotherapy appointment in the burns and plastics department at 6 weeks after your operation. This will help improve movement, strength, swelling and provide advice on cording, returning to activity and sport or other queries.

Your physiotherapist:.....

Date:.....

Time:.....

Directions – Next to Powys ward on the lower ground floor

General Advice - Returning to Activities

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

Tiredness and feeling a bit down are both quite normal after surgery so remember to get plenty of rest for the first few weeks at home.

Walking

Walking is a good exercise to maintain or improve general health after an operation and short daily walks when you get home will help. It will also help reduce fatigue.

Household Tasks

For the first six weeks, try to avoid heavy and repetitive tasks.

Driving

You must not drive until you have full control of a vehicle. This will take around six weeks.

Work

The best time for you to return to work will depend on the kind of job that you do. For sedentary type work you may feel ready to go back by 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.

Lifting

Start by lifting only light objects (around one kilogram), such as half a kettle of water.

Try to avoid heavier and repetitive tasks.

As you're able to lift your arm more, you can increase the amount of weight you lift, take it easy and progress this gradually.

Sport/leisure

Start working towards strengthening your shoulder and tummy muscles (core) at 6 weeks, before you return to gym or sport work. Most people feel able to return to their chosen activity at around 3 months.

Fatigue is common after this procedure, be patient with your progress.

Sex

It is common to feel tired after surgery, but a diagnosis of breast cancer does not stop your sex drive. However, it is sensible to wait until your wounds have healed before resuming sex.

There will be changes in the way your new breast feels. Try to talk about this with your partner and perhaps explore new ways of making love.

Frequently asked questions

Will I have a wound drain? How long will I have the drain for?

You will likely go home with back drain which will drain moderate amounts and removed around 10 days when drainage is roughly 50mls in 24hours.

After your drain has been removed we recommend wearing control pants that come higher than waist level and are tight fitting to help reduce swelling.

You will take antibiotics until the drains are removed.

How will my pain be managed?

Please talk to the nurse if you are in pain after your operation. It is important to control your pain for you to be able to move around.

Also note, at rest, your pain is likely to be better than when you move. Medication will be provided for you to go home with.

Will I have changes in sensation?

It is quite common to experience numbness, tingling or extra sensitivity down the inner arm. This usually subsides after a few months.

What is cording?

It is quite common to develop tight bands (cords) in and around your armpit following breast surgery. Although these may feel a little uncomfortable when you move the arm, it is very important that you continue with your exercises as these will help to stretch the cords. Your physiotherapist can advise you if they become troublesome.

Will I damage my surgery by lying on my front?

When your wound has healed this will not be harmful to your new breast or back.

When can I shower?

As soon as your drain is removed you can shower.

How long should I wear the sports bra/corset for?

You should wear your sports bra or corset day and night for 6 weeks.

What about if I have an implant?

This will not change your rehabilitation plan. During the first week you should remain cautious of moving your shoulder beyond 90 degrees from your body. Drains will stay in for two weeks irrespective of drainage with an implant.

Useful Resources:

Physiotherapy ----- 01792 703985

Julia Warwick ----- 01792 703975

Plastics dressing clinic ----- 01792 703857

Macmillan 'move more'

Breast cancer care

Breast Cancer Now

CancerFit blog

The BAPS app Wales

Couch to 5km

NHS Pilates

Canolfan Llosgladau a Llawieddyaeth Blastig Cymru
Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Bae Abertawe
Swansea Bay University
Health Board