

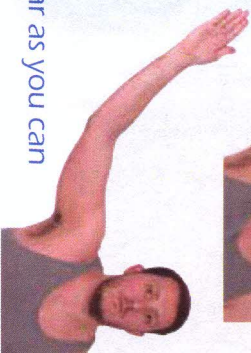
Patient information and advice following your Neck Dissection Operation

Physiotherapy Services

Exercise 5
Shrug your shoulders up
towards your ears and relax
down.



Exercise 6
Raise your arms overhead as far as you
can



Exercise 7.
Raise your arms out to the side as far as you can

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

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

Why should I exercise?

Unless your doctor has stated otherwise it is recommended that you start your exercises gently the day after your operation. Exercises are safe to perform even if you have drains, clips or stitches in place.

Sometimes a small nerve in your neck has to be removed to allow full clearance of the lymph nodes. This may result in shoulder weakness.

What exercises should I be doing?

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

- Shoulder and neck weakness
- Tightness of the skin and muscle
- Facial and neck swelling

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

Exercise 1

Gently tilt your head forward, taking your chin towards your chest



Exercise 2

Gently extend your head back as if you are looking up at the ceiling



Exercise 3

Slowly turn your head to one side and then repeat the other way



Exercise 4

Slowly tilt your head towards your shoulder and repeat on the other



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. Your surgeon or physiotherapist will be able to advise you on this.

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, clinical nurse specialist or physiotherapist.

How often do I have to exercise?

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

Neck and shoulder stiffness and tightness can occur long after surgery so it is important to carry on doing these exercises until you have regained the range of movement you had before your operation.

If you go on to have radiotherapy to your neck area this may also make the shoulder and neck stiffness worse. You should continue with these exercises during your treatment and after it has finished, indefinitely

What should I feel when performing these exercises?

It is normal to feel a stretching sensation and slight discomfort when performing these exercises especially on the operated side. This feeling should ease as you repeat the 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.

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

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.

Posture

It is important to maintain a good posture during and between exercises. Try to avoid slouching when you are sitting down and ensure you stand tall. It may be helpful to look at yourself in a mirror to ensure your head and shoulders are in a good position. The improvement in your posture will aid the movement of your shoulders and neck.