

Physiotherapy exercises and advice following axillary dissection surgery

Information for patients



This information booklet contains physiotherapy exercise and advice for people who have had an axillary dissection (surgery to remove lymph glands in their armpit or 'axilla').

Why exercise?

After the operation on your axilla, it is important that you move your arm so that the soft tissues around your shoulder do not become tight and cause you pain and difficulty moving.

These exercises are designed to help you regain normal movement of your shoulder without stressing your wound. They should be done slowly and gently.

You may feel some gentle pulling and discomfort, especially if you still have a wound drain in place. This will not cause any damage. You may prefer to start the exercises once the drain is removed to reduce any discomfort.

If you find there is excessive oozing, redness or severe pain, please stop the exercises and consult your physiotherapist, nurse or doctor as soon as possible.

General advice

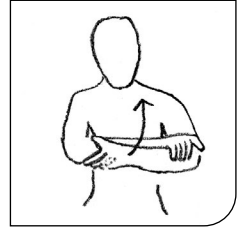
- Use pain-killers to reduce the pain before you exercise.
- It is normal for you to feel aching, discomfort or stretching when doing these exercises. However, if you experience intense and lasting pain (e.g. more than 30 minutes), it is an indication to change the exercise by doing it less forcefully, or less often. If this does not help, please talk to your physiotherapist.
- Do short, frequent sessions rather than one long session.
- You should aim to complete 5 repetitions of each exercise, 3 to 5 times per day, unless advised differently by your physiotherapist.
- It can be helpful to try to incorporate your exercises into your daily routine by associating exercises with the tasks you complete regularly. For example, if you regularly make cups of tea or coffee, you may wish to complete an exercise each time you wait for the kettle to boil.
- If you do not regain full movement at your shoulder within 2 to 3 weeks or would like further assistance once discharged from hospital, please contact the Physiotherapy Department. Contact details can be found in the “contact details” section at the end of this leaflet.

Shoulder exercises

These exercises will help to ease stiffness and pain in your shoulder, which will help your shoulder to recover. You should aim to complete 5 repetitions of each exercise, 3 to 5 times per day, unless advised differently by your physiotherapist.

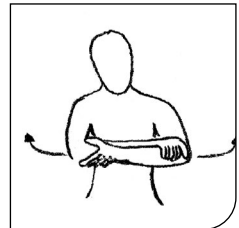
1. Shoulder flexion (supported forward arm lift)

Sitting. Support your affected arm with your other hand under your elbow. Gently lift your arm upwards as far as is comfortable. Return to the starting position.



2. Shoulder abduction (supported side arm lift)

Sitting. Support your affected arm with your other hand under your elbow. Gently move your affected arm out to the side as far as is comfortable. Return to the starting position.



Returning to normal activities

Activities

It is best to return to your usual activities gradually. You can start to do some light domestic chores as soon as you go home. You should avoid heavy lifting for 6 to 8 weeks after your surgery, unless advised otherwise by your physiotherapist or consultant.

Exercise

It is important to keep as active as you can after your surgery alongside your physiotherapy exercises. You should return to exercise gradually and aim to complete 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week as per NHS physical activity recommendations. This can be broken down to 30 minutes per day, 5 days a week. Moderate intensity means any exercise that raises your heart rate, makes you breathe faster and feel warmer. You should be able to speak comfortably when you are exercising at a moderate intensity. Improving your fitness could be achieved through simple changes to your routine, such as increasing the speed and frequency of walking. If you feel tired, try doing little and often, rather a lot in one go. It is important to listen to your body.

Driving

You should not drive until you feel confident to do so safely, and we advise you to inform your insurance provider prior to returning to driving.

The main physiotherapy considerations for driving are:

- Do you have enough movement in your shoulders to turn the steering wheel?
- Can you comfortably hold your arms on the steering wheel for the necessary length of time?
- Can you complete an emergency stop?

Always check with your consultant if you have any concerns or questions about returning to driving after your surgery.

Contact details

Churchill Surgical Physiotherapy Team

Telephone : 01865 235 391

(8.00am to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday)

Specialist Surgical Inpatient Physiotherapy Team

Telephone : 01864 221 540

(8.00am to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday)

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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