

# BREAST CANCER EXERCISES AFTER SURGERY

The exercises are designed for use in the days and weeks after breast cancer surgery. They are suitable for most people. If there are any ongoing concerns about any pre-existing arm or shoulder problems, a Specialist Consultation is required before commencing the exercises.

## INTRODUCTION

Why exercise?

The exercises will help women and indeed men who have undergone breast cancer surgery to get back the range of arm movements that were present before surgery or radiotherapy. Exercise may also help tissue to heal, as during exercise more oxygen is supplied to the area being moved, and to relieve pain.

When should exercises be started?

Exercises should start as soon as possible after the operation – ideally the day after. One can gradually reintroduce everyday activities such as using the vacuum cleaner, hanging out washing or driving. The Exercises must be done within limits that are comfortable for the individual, and for short periods, to begin with

How long will the exercises need to be done?

Muscles seize up very quickly if they are not used. Arm stiffness and tightness can occur long after surgery or radiotherapy so it is important to carry on doing these exercises as part of the daily routine.

Basic Exercises

Each exercise should be done three to five times to start with and gradually, when it feels right for the individual, increased to up to 10 times. Ideally, these exercises are started the day after Surgery

## Shoulder circling

Use this exercise as a warm up. Sitting down, relax your hands in your lap, shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, then circle them back and down. Do this the same number of times both forwards and backwards



### Hair brushing

Imagine you are going to brush or comb your hair. Keep your head up straight and raise your arm, moving your elbow away from your side. Pretend you are brushing or combing your hair from front to back. Start with one side only, then gradually increase to the whole head. Don't overdo, but keep trying.



### Assisted lift

Standing up, cross your arms, putting the hand of your unaffected arm under the elbow of your affected arm, with both elbows bent. With your affected arm supported in this way, lift your arms to shoulder level – higher if you can. Lower your arms slowly.



### Back scratching

Hold your arms out to the sides and bend your arms from the elbow. Then slowly reach up behind your back to just under your shoulder blades



### Bent arm

Standing or sitting, raise both your arms forward so they are at right angles to your body. Bend your elbows and rest your hands lightly on your shoulders. Lower your arms slowly, then raise them again.



### Advanced Exercises

These exercises should be done a few weeks after the drain or drains are taken out.

#### Arm lifts

Lie down on the bed or floor with a cushion or pillow to support your head. Clasp your hands together and, keeping your elbows straight, lift your arms up and over your head as far as you feel comfortable. Hold here for a count of ten, then lower your arms slowly. While lying down, take three or four really deep breaths and concentrate on relaxing your shoulders so they are not hunched up towards your ears.



#### Wall climbing

With your feet apart for balance, stand close to and facing a wall. Start with your hands at shoulder level, then gradually work your hands up the wall as far as you can without straining. Hold here for a count of ten, then slide your hands back to shoulder level before repeating the exercise. Mark or note the spot you reached on the wall and try to get higher each time.



### Back drying

With a towel or similar piece of cloth, use a gentle back-drying motion. Reverse the position so that your other arm is the higher one.



### Elbow push

Lie on your back with your hands behind your head and your elbows out to the sides. Gently push your elbows downwards as far as is comfortable. Hold for a count of ten, then relax. This exercise is particularly helpful if you go on to have radiotherapy as the treatment will often require you to be in this position.

