

## Physiotherapy

### Department of Rehabilitation

### Breast Surgery

### Post-operative Instructions

#### CARING FOR YOUR ARM AFTER BREAST SURGERY

##### i. General arm care tips

- You may prop your arm up on a pillow to prevent/reduce swelling of the surgical wound.
- Do not sleep on your affected arm or lie on that side.
- Do not restrict the affected arm during daily activities. Instead, try to use it as you normally would.

##### ii. General precautions for the affected arm after breast surgery

- ✓ Avoid constriction (e.g. blood pressure taking, tight watches/ jewelry/clothing).
- ✓ Avoid skin irritation (e.g. sunburns, scratches, insect bites) or skin puncture (e.g. blood taking/injection) on the affected arm. You can do so by wearing gloves while doing household chores that could be hard on your skin (e.g. gardening, dishwashing).
- ✓ Take care of your skin by cleaning and applying antiseptic cream if you sustain any wounds/insect bites to your affected arm.
- ✓ Avoid using the affected arm to lift/carry heavy loads (i.e. above 2 kg).
- ✓ Avoid deep kneading massage and heat application on the affected arm
- ✓ Follow instructions carefully regarding exercising the affected arm.
- ✓ Consult your doctor or breast care nurse if signs and symptoms of infection or swelling occur.

##### iii. Lymphoedema post-breast surgery

Lymphoedema is the accumulation of lymph fluid in your tissues. It can occur when your lymphatic system is affected during procedures such as surgery, lymph node removal and radiation. The lymphatic system then becomes less effective in removing lymph from the arm, which may result in lymphoedema. The risk of developing lymphoedema is higher in patients who have more axillary lymph nodes removed.

#### Signs of lymphoedema:

- Feeling of fullness, puffiness or heaviness in your arm
- Swelling of your hand, arm or chest wall
- Decreased flexibility of movement in your hand, wrist or arm
- Jewellery, watches or sleeves may feel tighter even though your weight has not changed
- Redness, increased warmth, swelling and pain may indicate skin infection, which may be associated with lymphoedema

If you have any signs of lymphoedema, do contact your doctor or nurse. Your doctor may refer you for physiotherapy, which can reduce or manage the swelling using manual lymphatic drainage techniques and compression, self-massages, and customised exercises.

### Post-mastectomy exercises for your arm (1<sup>st</sup> day after surgery)



#### Neck Stretching Exercises

Bend your neck to one side until you feel a gentle stretch. You may use your hands to help bend your neck. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds.

Repeat 5 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.

Repeat with the other side.



#### Neck Rotation Stretch

Turn your neck to one side until you feel a gentle stretch. You may use your hands to help turn your neck. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds.

Repeat 5 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.

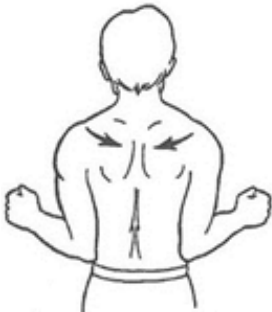
Repeat with the other side.



#### Shoulder Rolls

In a circular motion, gently roll both shoulders forward and backward.

Repeat 10 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.



#### Shoulder Pinch

With your arms at your sides, bring your elbows back, and squeeze your shoulder blades together.

Keep your shoulders back and down.

Repeat 10 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.

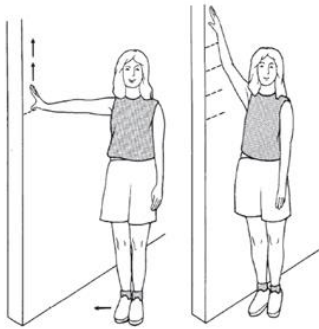


### **Forward Wall Walk**

Stand close to the wall and extend your affected arm directly in front of you so that your fingertips touch the wall (as shown in the diagram on the right).

Slowly walk your fingertips up and down the wall.

Repeat 10 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.



### **Side Wall Walk**

Stand with your affected arm next to the wall.

Slowly walk your fingertips up and down the wall.

Repeat 10 times for each set, try to do 3 to 5 sets each day.

### **Disclaimer:**

The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical conditions.