

Physiotherapy Department

Exercise programme after axillary dissection surgery

Information for patients



Introduction

This booklet contains a guide to exercises for anyone who has had surgery to remove the lymph glands in their armpit or 'axilla'.

It has been compiled by experienced staff and patients. It answers those questions most frequently asked by patients.

This information is only a guide and your healthcare team will give you more detailed information as and when you need it.

We hope that you and your family will find the information both reassuring and supportive.

The importance of 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 restore normal movement of your shoulder without stressing your wound. They should be done slowly. You may feel some gentle pulling and discomfort, especially if you still have a wound drain in place. This will not cause any damage.

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 points

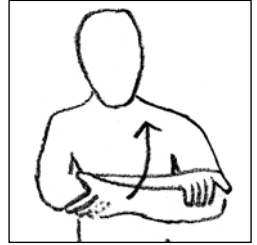
- Use pain-killers and /or ice packs to reduce the pain **before** you exercise
- It is **normal** for you to feel aching, discomfort or stretching when doing these exercises. However, if you experience **intense and lasting pain** (e.g. more than 30 minutes), it is an indication to change the exercise by doing it less forcefully, or less often. If this does not help then please talk to your physiotherapist.
- **Do short, frequent sessions** (e.g. 5-10 minutes, 4 times a day) rather than one long session.
- **Gradually increase the number of repetitions** that you do.
- Aim for the number of repetitions your therapist advises (the numbers given here are rough guidelines).
- Get into the habit of doing them!
- If you do not regain full movement at your shoulder within 2-3 weeks or would like further assistance once discharged from hospital, please contact the Physiotherapy Department on 01865 231181

Early exercises for 1 to 5 days post op

These exercises ease stiffness and pain in your shoulder, which will help your shoulder to recover.

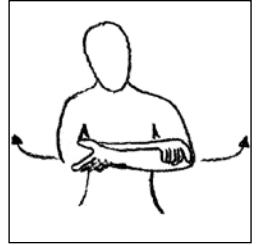
1. **Shoulder flexion**

Sitting. Support your affected arm with your other hand under the elbow. Gently lean forward. Rock your arm backwards and forwards as far as your pain allows.



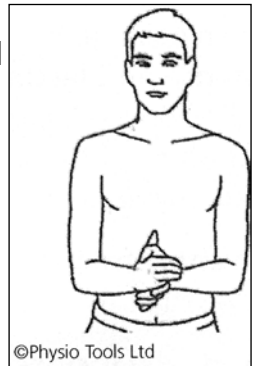
2. **Shoulder abduction**

Sitting. Support your affected arm with your other hand under the elbow. Gently lean forward. Rock your affected arm from side to side as far as your pain allows.



3. **Shoulder lateral rotation**

Sitting. Keep your elbow into your side and hold onto the wrist of your affected arm. Gently move your hand to the side of your body. Return to starting position.



Mobility exercises

(to start from 5 days after your operation or when guided by your therapist)

These exercises help you regain mobility in your shoulder. You will need a stick, broom, mop or long umbrella. Repeat each one 10 times, 4 times a day, unless your physiotherapist advises you otherwise. If possible, hold for 5 seconds when you get to the end point.

1. Shoulder flexion

Lift the stick up above your head. You can do this lying down, standing or sitting – as you prefer.



2. Shoulder abduction

Stand upright, holding the stick in both hands. Keeping your elbows as straight as possible, bring your arms out to the side and upwards towards your shoulder.



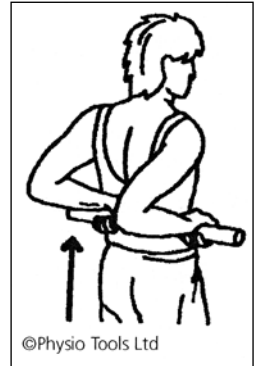
3. Shoulder extension

Stand upright, holding the stick in both hands behind your back. Move the stick away from your back, keeping your elbows straight.



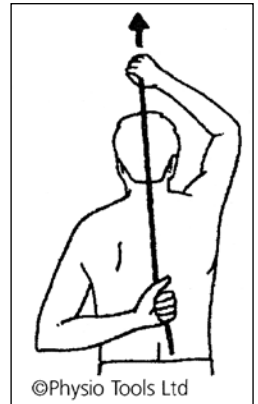
4. **Shoulder internal rotation**

Hold your stick behind your back with both hands as close together as possible. Lift the stick up as high as possible.



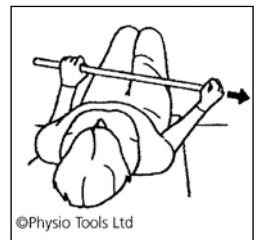
5. **Shoulder internal rotation (progression)**

Stand upright. Place a towel over your shoulder and down your back. Take hold of the towel with the affected arm and pull upwards bringing your arm further up your back.



6. **Shoulder external rotation**

Standing or lying down, with your elbow against your body and at a right angle. Hold stick in your hands. Move the stick sideways thus pushing the arm to be exercised outwards.



Progress Exercises

(start 2 to 4 weeks after your operation)

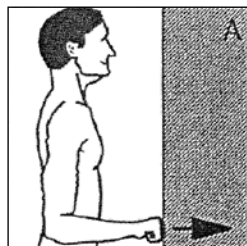
Static strengthening exercises

Static shoulder exercises work the muscles in the shoulder without moving the shoulder itself. For all these exercises, your elbow should be bent to a right angle and your arm should not move.

Repeat each one 10 times and hold for 5-10 seconds.
Repeat 3 times daily.

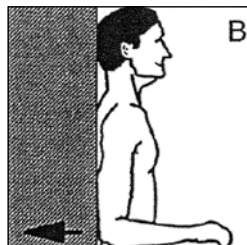
1. Shoulder flexors

Stand facing the wall.
Attempt to push your fist forwards into the wall.



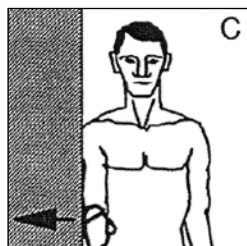
2. Shoulder extensors

Stand with your back to the wall.
Attempt to press your elbow backwards against the wall.



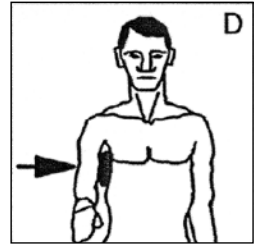
3. Shoulder abductors

Stand with the outside of your affected arm in contact with the wall.
Attempt to move the whole arm out to the side, against the wall.



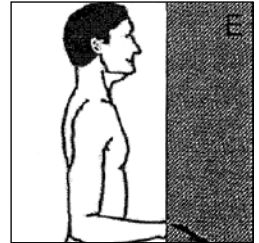
4. **Shoulder adductors**

Stand with a small rolled up towel under your affected arm.
Attempt to squeeze the whole arm to your side.



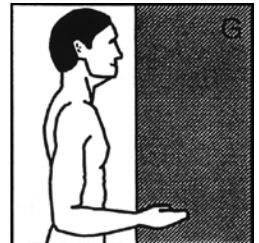
5. **External rotators**

Stand with the outside of your hand held against a wall or a jammed open door.
Attempt to move the affected hand outwards.
Do not allow your elbow to move away from your side.



6. **Internal rotators**

Stand with the inside of the hand of your affected arm held against a wall or jammed open door.
Attempt to move the affected hand inwards.
Do not allow your elbow to move away from your side.



Scapula setting exercises

In order for your shoulder to return to normal movement, strength and function, it is important that the shoulder blade is aligned and supported sufficiently. These exercises will help to stabilise the shoulder by working on the two main muscles, the lower trapezius and serratus anterior. It is important to do these exercises slowly and carefully, and repeat 5-10 times each.

1. Lower trapezius, can be done in sitting or standing

Sitting or standing upright, set your shoulder blade by drawing it backwards and down your back. Hold in this position for 5 seconds.

To progress this exercise, walk your fingers down a wall whilst holding this position.

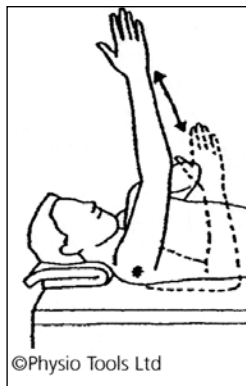


2. Serratus anterior (lying down).

Lie on your back with your shoulder at 90 degrees to your body, with your elbow straight. Lift your arm vertically to bring your hand closer to the ceiling.

Hold for 5-10 seconds.

Gently lower down.



Useful information & telephone numbers

Your Consultant is
Secretary to your Consultant	Tel
GP	Tel
SSIP Ward, West Wing	01865 231233
Physiotherapy Department	01865 231181
Clinical Nurse Specialist	01865 228233

(If you experience problems getting through to the ward for advise, please contact either your GP or contact the Hospital Switchboard on 01865 741166 and ask to speak to the On Call Registrar for Plastic Surgery)

Further information

If you have any questions regarding the information that you have read, please contact the Physiotherapy Department on **01865 231181**.

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**. When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust

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