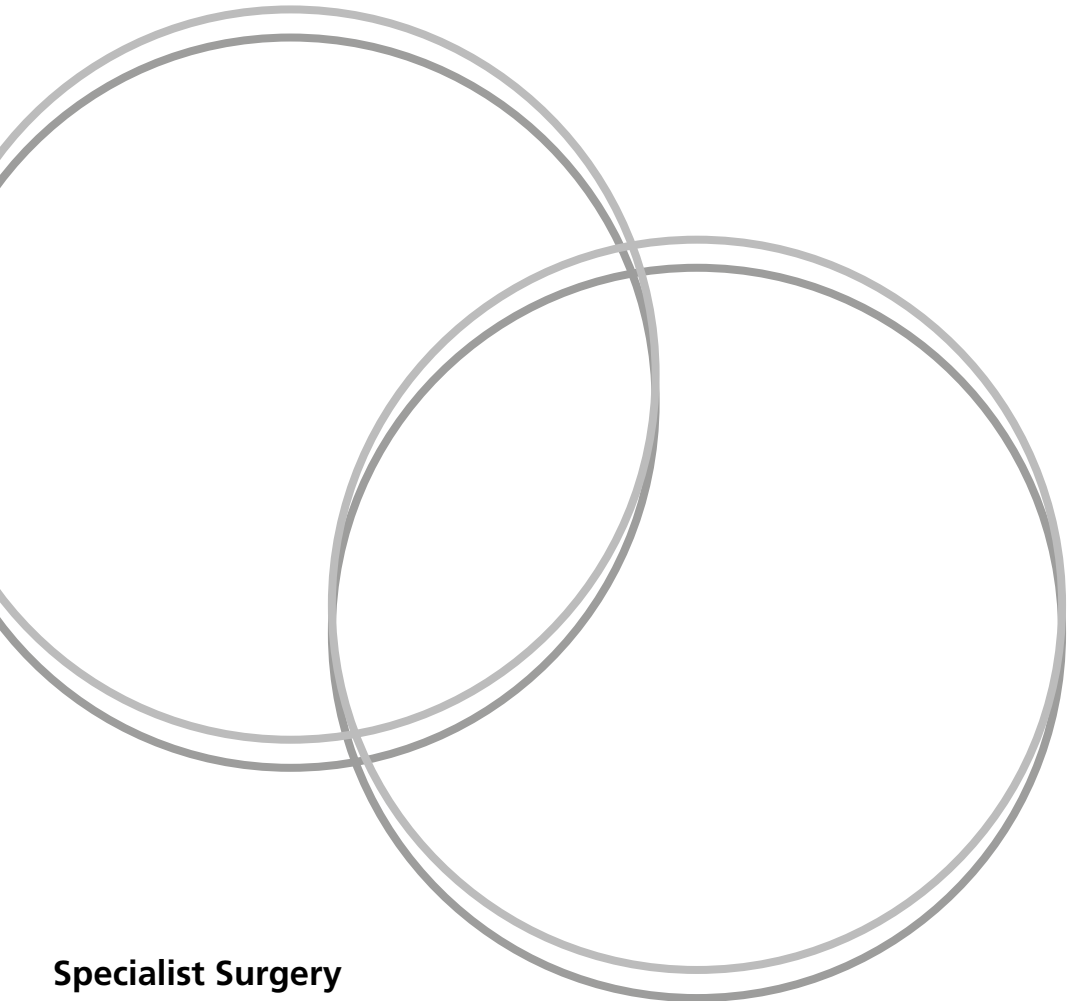


Physiotherapy advice after radial forearm free flap surgery

Information for patients



Why is physiotherapy needed after a radial forearm free flap operation?

It is likely that you will experience some stiffness and weakness in your arm after having this surgery. Physiotherapy is important, as it can help you regain full function of your arm and return to your daily activities.

After the operation

Day of surgery (post operative day 0)

- You will have bandages on your arm, to protect the wound.
- The shoulder of your operated arm will need to be supported on pillows, so that it is comfortable.
- Your arm should be raised (elevated), to reduce swelling.

Post operative day 1

- It is important to start moving as soon as possible. Your physiotherapist will help you with this.
- You should aim to sit out of bed in a chair for 1-2 hours and try to go for a short walk.
- It is very important that you keep your head in a neutral position, to make sure the flap receives a good blood supply. If you start to feel tired when you're in the chair or walking, to the point where you are unable to support your head in a neutral position, you must let your nurse/physiotherapist know. They will help you to return to bed.
- Start to complete exercises **1** and **2**, **unless advised otherwise by your surgeon/physiotherapist.**
- Continue to support the shoulder of your operated arm with pillows when you're in bed and in the chair.

Post operative day 2-7

- **When the drains in your neck have been removed** you may be able to begin the exercises in the neck dissection booklet. This will be given to you by the physiotherapist when they feel you are ready to start the exercises.
- Continue with exercises **1** and **2** from this leaflet, to prevent stiffness in your arm.

Post operative day 7-10

- You can start exercises **3** and **4** **unless advised otherwise by your surgeon/physiotherapist.**

Exercises from day 1 onwards

These exercises should be completed slowly and gently. Mild discomfort is to be expected, but the exercises should not be painful. If you experience pain, stop immediately and tell your physiotherapist.

1. Elbow flexion/extension

- Start with your operated arm by your side.
- Bend your elbow as far as possible.
- Hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Slowly straighten your elbow until you are back in the starting position.

Repeat 10 times.

You can use your non-operated arm to help with the movement, if needed.



2. Finger flexion/extension

- Straighten your fingers all the way out.
- Hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Slowly squeeze your fingers closed, to make a fist.
- Hold for 1-2 seconds.

Repeat 10 times.



Exercises from day 7 onwards

3. Wrist flexion/extension

- Rest the wrist of your operated forearm on the edge of a table or arm rest of a chair.
- Squeeze the muscles in your forearm (palm side) so that your fingers point down to the ground.
- Hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Bring your wrist up so that your fingers point towards the ceiling.
- Hold for 1-2 seconds.

Repeat 10 times.

Your fingers don't need to be completely straight during this exercise.



4. Supination/pronation

- Sit or stand with your arm by your side and your elbow bent to 90 degrees.
- Start with your palm facing down to the ground.
- Turn your hand over so that your palm is now facing the ceiling.

Repeat 10 times.

Try to keep your elbow tucked into your side throughout this exercise.



Physical activity

It is important to carry out some gentle physical activity, in addition to the exercises provided by your physiotherapist.

Aim to complete 150 minutes of 'moderate' exercise a week. This can be broken up into 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise 5 times a week, such as walking or cycling on a stationary exercise bike. 'Moderate' exercise refers to activity which raises your heart rate, making you breathe faster and feel warmer.

You should be working to a level where you still able to maintain a conversation.

Follow-up

When you leave hospital will be offered a referral to Outpatient Physiotherapy by your physiotherapist, to continue your rehabilitation.

If you have any questions about your exercises or referral, please contact the Specialist Surgical Physiotherapist.

Tel: **01865 235 391**

(8.00am to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday)

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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