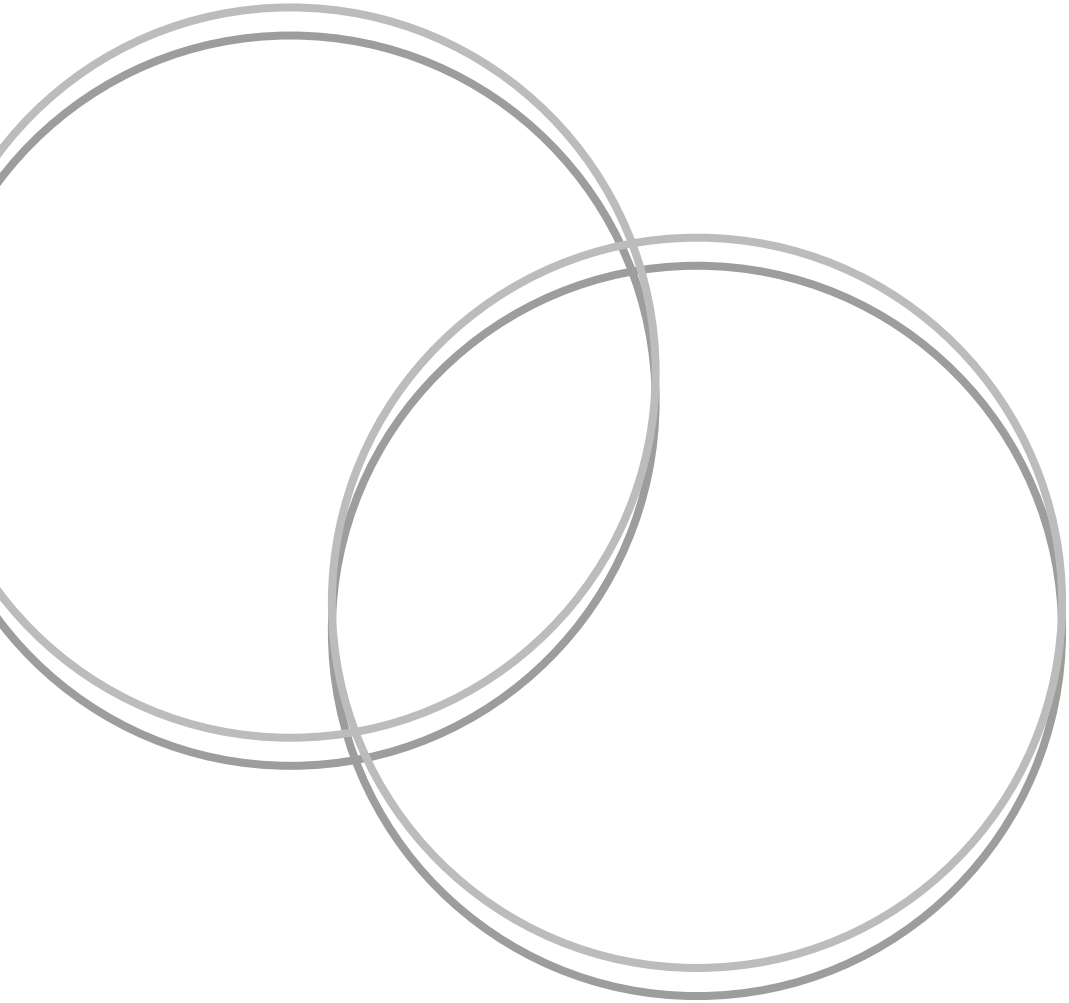
NHS
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Joint and skin Graft Versus Host Disease (GVHD)

Exercise information for patients



Joint and skin Graft Versus Host Disease (GVHD)

Post transplant it is important to let your team know if the movement in your joints start to become restricted.

The joints most likely to be affected by GVHD are your hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders and ankles. GVHD can occur at any time following your transplant.

We advise if you start experiencing stiffness in your joints to gently start stretching the muscles around these joints to prevent further loss of movement. It is also beneficial to try and keep active to keep your joints moving.

Please see some example exercises below that will help you to manage your joint and/or skin GVHD.

Remember:

- You don’t need to do all these stretches in one go.
- Try to stretch daily. Some people find it helpful to set alarms on their watch or phone to support them to do this. Some people find it easier to incorporate the exercises into daily everyday tasks, for example, brushing their teeth or waiting for the kettle to boil.
- Make sure you stay still and hold the stretch in one position for 30 seconds.
- Don’t bounce or move around whilst holding the stretch.
- Stretching should not be painful.
- Ease off the stretch or don’t continue stretching if you feel pain.

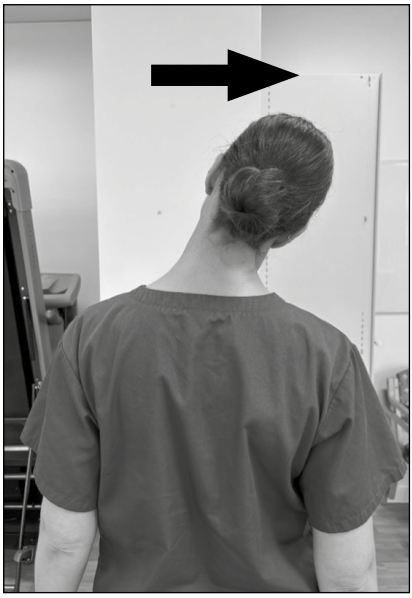
Tell your transplant team if:

- You are finding the exercises painful.
- The movement in your joints is becoming worse.
- You need advice on ways to adapt these exercises for your ability.

Exercises

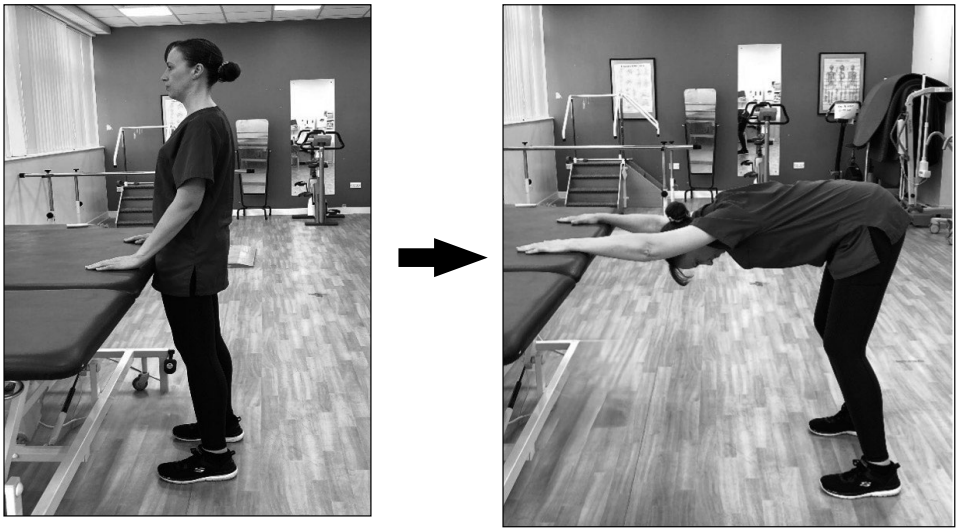
1. Neck stretch

1. You can do this exercise seated or in standing.
2. Draw your shoulders back and relax them down towards the floor.
3. Keep your eyes focused on something in front of you and gently take your left ear down towards your left shoulder. Make sure you keep your right shoulder down as you stretch.
4. Hold for 15 seconds.
5. Take a breath in. On breathing out see if you can take your ear a little further towards your left shoulder.
6. Hold for a further 15 seconds and then slowly bring your head back to the start position.
7. Repeat steps 1 to 5 to the right side.



2. Shoulder stretch

1. Place both hands on your kitchen work top or similar.
2. Look down towards the floor and gently walk backwards until you feel a stretch in your shoulders and arms. Don't worry if you cannot fully straighten your arms, just stretch within a range that feels comfortable for you.
3. If the muscles at the back of your legs are tight, bend your knees slightly.
4. Hold for 10 seconds.
5. Slowly walk all the way back towards the work top until you are fully upright.
6. Repeat steps 1 to 4 two more times.



3. Hand, wrist and elbow stretch

1. Place your palms and fingers together.
2. Try and move your elbows up towards the ceiling whilst keeping your palms together and fingers straight.
3. Hold this position for 30 seconds, then relax.
4. You can support your arms on a table or pillow whilst doing this stretch if this is more comfortable for you.



4. Doorway Shoulder Stretch

1. Stand in a doorway. Place the palm of your left hand against the door frame with your elbow bent at a right angle (90 degrees).
2. Keeping your palm against the doorway, turn your body away from your hand until you feel a gentle stretch.
3. Hold this position for 30 seconds, then relax.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 with your right hand against the door frame.





5. Calf stretch

1. Stand holding on to a wall or chair.
2. Step one leg behind you.
3. Keep your front leg bent and your back leg straight.
4. Keep your toes pointing forward.
5. Gently move your weight forward on to your front knee until you feel a stretch in the muscles in your back leg below your knee.
6. Hold for 30 seconds.
7. Repeat steps 1 to 6 on your other leg.



6. Hamstring stretch

1. Sitting on your sofa or bed with your legs out in front of you.
2. Loop a towel around your left foot.
3. Sit as upright as possible and use the towel to gently pull your foot towards you. You should feel a stretch along the back of your leg.
4. Hold this position for 30 seconds, then relax.
5. Repeat steps 1 to 4 with your right leg.



7. Hand squeezes

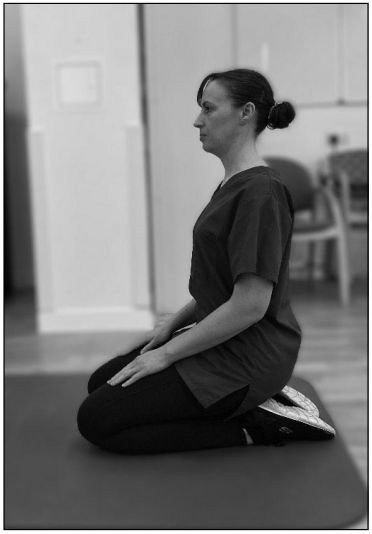
1. Gently make a fist with your left hand and then straighten your fingers.
2. Repeat 10 times.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 on your right hand.

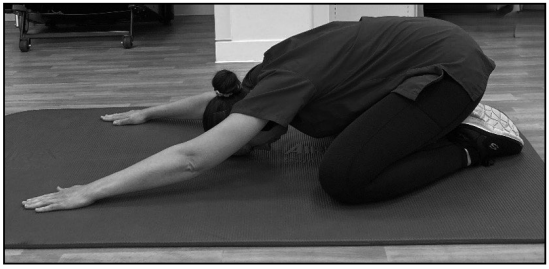




8. Hip, thigh and back stretch – 'Child's yoga pose'

1. Kneel on a mat on your floor or kneel on your bed if you are unable to get down on to the floor.
2. You can keep your knee's hip width apart or closer together depending on what feels more comfortable for you.
3. Lower your hips towards your heels. Either sit on your heels or lower your hips as close to your heels as possible.
4. Breathe out, place your palms down on to the mat or bed and slowly reach your hands forward out in front of you as far as able.
5. Take slow deep breaths and relax into the pose. Rest your forehead on the mat or bed if able to. You can rest your forehead on a pillow or yoga block, rather than on the mat, if this is more comfortable. Try and stay in the pose for a minimum of 30 seconds but ideally up to 2-3 minutes.
6. Slowly come out of the stretch by relaxing your arms and sitting back towards your heels again.





When not to exercise:

- This is not an exhaustive list so please be guided by your body and do not start to exercise if you are feeling unwell.
- **If you have chest, neck, arm or jaw pain or worsening breathlessness – call 999 straight away**

Should you experience any of the following, stop exercising and seek advice from your GP or your transplant team (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm 07500 765461, excluding bank holidays). For out of hours please call our patient hotline number on 01865 572192.

- Bad headache
- A fever
- Problems with your blood pressure
- New diarrhoea, nausea or vomiting in past 48hrs
- Developed any new or recent pain which has not resolved
- Have experienced recent or frequent dizziness or light headedness
- Blood counts lower than normal for you or awaiting imminent transfusion
- Uncontrolled blood sugars
- Loss of coordination
- Mental confusion

If your blood counts are low or if you receive regular transfusions, please speak to your transplant team for advice before you start exercising (07500 765461).

If you have had any previous or recent problems with your heart, please ensure you complete a warm up prior to starting these exercises. This can be achieved by gently marching your legs and arms on the spot for a few minutes in sitting or standing.

Contact details

This leaflet has been created for patients who have had a Stem Cell Transplant.

If you have any questions about anything covered in this leaflet, exercise queries or concerns about exercising or for any questions about your treatment, please text or call the Bone Marrow Transplant team on 07500 765461.

If you have received CAR-T cell therapy please text or call 07920 183239.

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
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

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charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

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