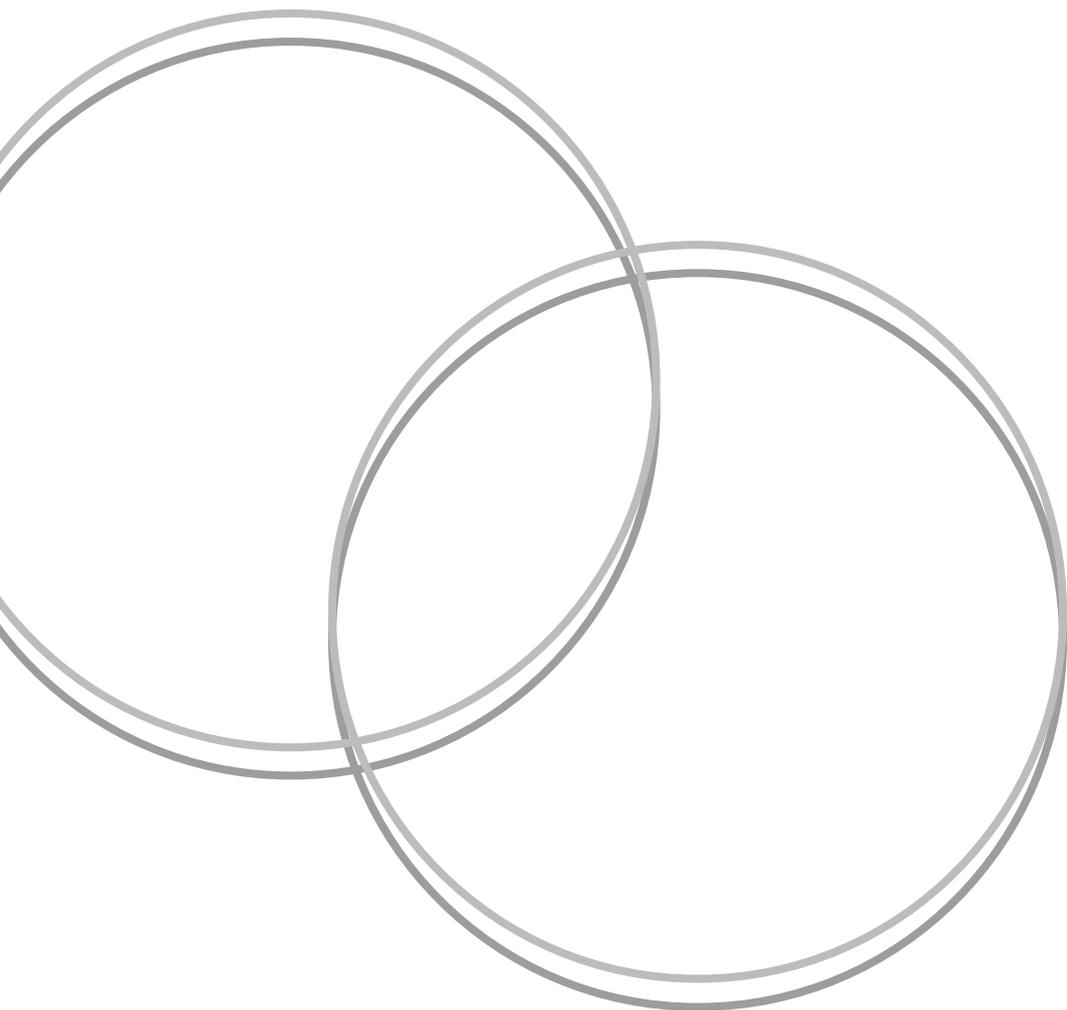


Breast Reconstruction Physiotherapy Guidance

Information for patients



Introduction to physiotherapy

Physiotherapy is an essential part of the recovery from breast reconstruction surgery. The exercises described below help to maintain good posture, prevent your shoulder and back from becoming stiff and facilitate a return to normal activities. They start gently and build up over 8 weeks. Despite initial discomfort and tiredness, it is important to start this process as soon as possible as it will help you to heal and make you feel better.

Please liaise with your surgeon to check if there are any post-operative restrictions.

Pre-operative exercises

Before your operation, it is beneficial to complete exercises to help with your post-operative recovery. This can include aerobic activities to build up fitness but also strengthening and flexibility exercises. Examples are as follows:

Aerobic activities:

Brisk walks, cycling, swimming, gardening, housework, dancing, running and participation in sport i.e. Netball, tennis.

(3 to 5 days per week for 30-40 min per session)

Flexibility and strengthening activities:

Online classes such as yoga, pilates and weight work are available on the NHS website free of charge.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio

(2 to 3 days per week, 10 to 12 repetitions per exercise, or as advised).

Post-operative breathing and circulation exercises

After your operation, it is important to complete both breathing and circulation exercises to help reduce the risk of complications from reduced activity and the anaesthetic. You can complete these exercises in sitting.

Breathing exercises:

Whilst keeping relaxed, take a long, slow, and deep breath in. Hold for a couple of seconds before slowly breathing out.

Repeat this 3 times every hour.

If coughing is difficult, hold a pillow over your wounds to help support them. You can also try a "huff" technique where you breathe out as if you are trying to steam up a mirror.

Circulation exercises:

Whilst in the bed or chair, pump your foot up and down and circle the ankle.

Repeat 10 times a few times each hour.

Post-operative mobility guidance

How to get out of bed:

You can use the “roll technique” to make getting out of bed more comfortable. This involves rolling over on to your side and lowering your legs off the side of the bed. Using your non-operated arm or more comfortable side, if you have had surgery involving both sides, to push up your body so that you are sitting upright.

How to manage the stairs:

When going up the stairs, you can hold onto the rail and lead with the stronger/more comfortable leg. Bring your other leg up to join it on the step.

When going down the stairs, you can hold onto the rail and lead with your weaker/most uncomfortable leg. Then take a step down with your other leg, onto the same step.

Go one step at a time until you feel comfortable and confident to go up and down normally.

Post-operative scar massage

After your operation, you may get tightness and different sensations surrounding the scars. Once the wound has healed, you can start to work on this.

Using the palm of your hand or fingers, apply gentle pressure and massage in a circular motion using a non-perfumed moisturiser. You can also stroke and tap the scar and surrounding skin. This may help to ease some of the different sensations such as tingling /numbness that you experience but this may take time to resolve and sometimes symptoms can continue.

EXERCISES

To access a video format of these exercises:
scan the QR code →



Stage 1 – *Within the first 4 weeks*

Repeat the exercises 2-3 times a day

Posture advice

Following your operation, it is important to maintain a good posture to prevent tightness and limitations in movement. You can keep a good posture by thinking about the following:

- Stand tall and straight
- Try to get your ears in line with your shoulders and avoid poking your chin forwards
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and back (try not to slouch forwards)

Neck range of movement

Side flexion

Tilt your head towards one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Hold for approximately 5 seconds before repeating to the other side.

Repeat 3 times in each direction

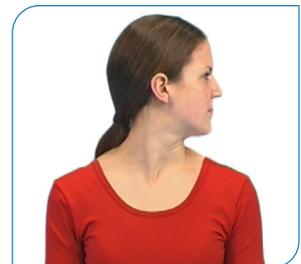


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Neck rotation

Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold for approximately 5 seconds before repeating to the other side.

Repeat 3 times in each direction



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Core activation with pelvic tilt

Lie on your back with your knees bent up and your feet hip distance apart.

Imagine your pelvis is a bucket of water. Tip it backwards to spill some water out the back of the bucket and you will feel your back gently flatten onto the mat. Now tip it forwards to spill some water out of the front of the bucket and you will feel your lower back arch slightly.

Repeat 10 times

Find your 'neutral spine' position by resting the bucket halfway between these two movements. There should be a small space between your back and the mat.

Maintaining the neutral spine position, slowly draw up through the pelvic floor and draw your belly button back as if you are fitting a tight pair of trousers. Hold this gentle contraction and keep breathing for up to ten breaths.

Trunk twists

Lie on your back with your knees bent. In a controlled manner move your knees from side to side. Go only as far as you can without moving your shoulders or letting your back arch.

Repeat 10 times



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Shoulder shrugs and rolls

Keep your arms by your side and lift your shoulders toward your ears. Return to the starting position and relax.

Repeat 10 times



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Pendulums

Stand leaning on a table with one hand. Let your other arm hang relaxed straight down. Swing your arm forwards, backwards, left and then right.

*Repeat 10 times in each direction
(Complete on both sides if you have had surgery affecting both limbs)*



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Stage 2 – Week 4-8

Repeat the exercises 2-3 times a day

Only progress to this next stage once the wound has healed. If there are any concerns from your Breast Reconstruction Team, then delay stretching/strengthening until advised.

To access a video format of these exercises: scan the QR code →



Clam exercise

Start by lying on your side with your hips bent to 45 degrees and knees bent to 90 degrees. Draw the top hip downwards away from the top shoulder to create a small space between your waist and the mat.



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Keep your feet together and lift the knee upwards. Keep your pelvis still. In a controlled manner lower the knee back down. Feel the muscles in the side of your buttocks working.

Repeat 10 times on each side

Marching on the spot

Start by standing tall and holding onto a worktop. In turn, lift each knee up as high as possible and repeat with the other leg, as if marching on the spot.



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Gradually, reduce your arm support and increase the time spent on each leg.

Repeat 10 times on each side

Shoulder mobility exercises

Clasped hands assisted flexion

Lying on your back, clasp your hands together and lift your arms up over your head.

Repeat 10 times



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Shoulder flexion with a stick

Stand tall and hold a stick with hands shoulder width apart. With straight arms lift the stick above your head. Return to the starting position. Do not shrug your shoulders.

Repeat 10 times



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Shoulder abduction with a stick

Stand tall and grip one end of the stick with the arm to be exercised. Lift the stick up sideways by assisting with the other arm.

Repeat 10 times



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Walking up the wall

Stand facing a wall. 'Walk' your fingers up the wall as high as possible. Reverse down in the same way.

Repeat 10 times



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Child's pose

Sitting on your knees, let your arms slide along the floor as far as possible. Push your bottom back and down and the chest towards the floor. Breathe out while doing the exercise.

Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times



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Hand behind back stretch

Stand with your arms behind your back. Grasp the wrist of the arm you want to exercise and slide your hands up the back.

Repeat 10 times



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Chest stretch

Lying on your back with hands behind your neck and elbows pointing towards the ceiling. Move the elbows apart and down to touch the floor.

Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times



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Side stretch

Stand straight with one hand on your hip and the other straight up.

Bend to the side with opposite arm reaching overhead. Keep your pelvis in mid-position.

Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times



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Shoulder strengthening exercises

(Only if near full flexibility has been achieved)

As you build up to more weight work, you can reduce this to 3 times a week to ensure recovery time.

Incline press-ups

Stand and lean forwards onto a worktop. Your hands should be in line with your shoulders and your elbows close to your body. Keep your shoulders back and your neck and back straight.

Slowly complete a push-up

Repeat 10 times



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Shoulder flexion – low weight

Stand tall and keep your shoulders down. Lift a light weight forwards and up above your head before slowly controlling it back down.

Repeat 10 times (progress to 2 sets)



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Shoulder abduction – low weight

Stand tall and keep your shoulders down. Lift a light weight sideways and up above your head before slowly controlling it back down.

Repeat 10 times (progress to 2 sets)



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Trunk mobility

Trunk rotation

Sit up tall in a chair with your legs hip width apart and cross your arms over your chest.

Slowly rotate your body to the side before slowly returning to face the front and repeat to the other side.

Repeat 5 times in each direction



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Core stability

Shoulder bridge

Start by lying on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Cross your arms over your chest.

Whilst maintaining core activation, as previously described, gently roll your lower back into the mat and lift your buttocks off the floor and peel your spine off bit by bit until you are resting on your shoulder blades and your hips are straight.

Slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat 10 times



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Side bend

Lie on your side with your hips slightly bent and knees bent to 90°. Support your upper body on your underneath forearm. Lift your underneath waist and ribcage away from the mat. Hips and shoulders stacked and facing forwards. Top arm resting long on top of the legs. Neck long in alignment with the trunk.



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Lift your pelvis off the mat, forming a diagonal line from your head to the knees. Simultaneously, reach your top arm upwards in an arc within your peripheral vision. Hold your side bend before lowering.

Repeat 10 times on each side

Stage 3 – Week 8 onwards

After 8 weeks you can start to build up to more advanced upper body strength work, trunk and abdominal exercises as you feel able.

You can return to swimming once your wounds have healed and have sufficient movement and strength to complete the required stroke action.

You can return to running after 8 weeks and when advised that this is safe from your breast surgeon. You should start off slowly with a supportive sports bra.

When to activate a physiotherapy referral:

Please contact your Breast Reconstruction Team to activate a physiotherapy referral after 8 weeks if you have:

- limited movement and strength in the shoulder
- back pain
- limited function/difficulty returning to previous level of activity.

Disclaimer

*These exercises are a **guide only** and before starting them you should consult your physiotherapist/doctor to ensure that they are suitable for your needs.*

This information does not override any advice/information/restrictions given by your doctor or physiotherapist.

If you have any pain or questions when completing these exercises, then please contact your physiotherapist.

Contact details:

Breast Reconstruction Nurses: **01865 234293**

Physiotherapy Outpatients: **01865 221540**

Physiotherapy-JR@ouh.nhs.uk

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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www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



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