

LONG TERM POST OPERATIVE ADVICE

SKIN CARE - follow these precautions:

AVOID Cuts / Scratches
USE Gloves when gardening
Gloves when washing up
Thimble when sewing

AVOID Burns
USE Oven Gloves

AVOID Sunburn
USE High factor sun cream
Light clothing to cover up

AVOID Razors / Waxing / Laser
USE Depilatory cream / electric razors

AVOID Insect bites
USE Repellent

AVOID Fungal infections
MAINTAIN Good skin hygiene

AVOID ON THE AFFECTED LIMB

- Injections / blood taking
- Blood pressure
- Acupuncture
- Tight or restrictive clothing / jewellery

DO NOT take very hot baths / saunas

CAUTION with head and neck massage

General recommendations

- Take care manicuring nails, do not push cuticles back.
- Treat cuts/scratches immediately with antiseptic.
- A pressure garmet may be required for flying.
- Moisturise your skin daily after showering or bathing. Always apply in the same direction of hair growth.

LYMPHOEDEMA

What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is a swelling caused by the build up of lymph fluid in the tissues. A minority of patients who have had surgery and/or radiotherapy go on to develop lymphoedema.

Why does lymphoedema occur?

This build up can be due to impairment of the lymph system after surgery or radiotherapy to the lymph nodes in the axilla (armpit) and surrounding area. It can occur immediately following surgery or radiotherapy or can develop later, sometimes many years after treatment.

How can lymphoedema be managed?

Symptoms of lymphoedema can be well controlled in most cases. Treatment is aimed at reducing swelling by encouraging other healthy parts of the lymph system to work more effectively. The advice given in this leaflet will also help to reduce the risk of developing lymphoedema.

Signs to watch for include:

- redness or swelling of the arm, hand or chest
- a feeling of heaviness in the arm
- any tightness around the shoulder/upper arm area.

An educational video with further information is available on the Bon Secours website:
www.bonsecours.ie/bsc-physio-oncology.

If you have any queries regarding any of the information in this leaflet, contact the:

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PHYSIOTHERAPY ADVICE AFTER MASTECTOMY AND / OR REMOVAL OF AXILLARY LYMPH NODES

PHYSIOTHERAPY

INTRODUCTION

This leaflet provides information and advice after mastectomy and / or removal of axillary lymph nodes

IMMEDIATE POST SURGERY EXERCISES

These exercises are designed to reduce swelling and restore normal function to your shoulder and arm. They can be started on the first day after your operation.

Exercises 1-3 should be done **ten times each hour** for the first 3 days, then 3 times daily after this.

1. Place your hand on your stomach. Relax your stomach - breathe in and allow your stomach to rise under your hand, breathe out and your stomach should fall.

2. Bend and straighten the elbow.



3. Make a fist with the hand of the operated side and relax.



The following exercises should be done three times daily, with ten repetitions of each exercise.

4. Shrug both shoulders.
5. Press shoulder blades back.
6. Cross arms in front, move arms from side to side "rocking the baby".
7. Lie down, clasp both hands together and stretch both arms out in front of you. Then gently lift the arms above your head.*



Two days following your surgery, include the following

8. Hair brushing.



Once your drains are removed include

9. Wall reaching forwards and sideways, leading with your thumb.



10. Stretch by placing your hands behind your ears and allow your elbows to fall back.



* If you have had a **tissue expander** inserted do not lift the arm above shoulder height for 4 weeks post surgery. On days of expansion you may feel more sore or tight.

If you have had an **implant inserted do not lift the arm above shoulder height for 6 weeks post surgery. Ensure to book in to see your physiotherapist at 6 weeks post surgery.

*** If you are to have **radiotherapy** continue with all exercises up to, during and for 6 weeks after radiotherapy.

POST SURGERY ADVICE

- Use the affected arm as normally as possible. However, avoid doing heavy activities or carrying anything heavy with the affected arm initially.
- Walking is recommended immediately after surgery. Walk tall and allow your arm to swing. Go at a pace whereby you can still talk but would not have enough "puff" to sing a song. Build it up gradually to at least 30 minutes a day.
- Try to do the exercises in front of a mirror to ensure correct posture.

POST-OPERATIVE ADVICE UP TO 2-3 MONTHS POST SURGERY

- By six weeks, full movement of the shoulder should be restored and your wound should be healed.
- Usual daily activities such as household chores can be reintroduced gradually, as is comfortable.
- Incorporate shoulder exercises into everyday activities e.g. towel drying your back, reaching top shelves, hanging clothes on line.
- Consult with your surgeon before returning to driving, work and sport.
- During your recovery, you may notice tight bands in the armpit or along the arm, these are known as cords (see image below). They generally resolve within 6 months. Continue with your exercises and arrange to see your physiotherapist if you feel that cords are present. Do not be concerned if these "ping" and break.



- Tingling and numbness of the arm and chest area after surgery is normal. This can last for some time.
- Any sudden increase in swelling in your arm or chest area, front or back, should be reported to the Breast Care Nurse.