

# Exercises After Breast Surgery

*(for Lifehouse use only)*

SURNAME		MRN
OTHER NAMES		<input type="checkbox"/> MALE <input type="checkbox"/> FEMALE
D.O.B. ____/____/____	M.O.	
ADDRESS		
LOCATION		

You have had one of the following operations:

- Breast and axillary surgery without reconstruction
- Breast surgery and axillary surgery with reconstruction using a tissue expander or implant
- Breast surgery with reconstruction using a latissimus dorsi flap

Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe to start doing these exercises.

If you have any concerns, please talk with your surgeon, or contact your physiotherapist on 85 14 0642 or 85 14 0248.

# The Day After Surgery

You might have one or more drains under your arm, but this should not stop you from using your arm as long as it is *below shoulder height*.

Try to use your arm for normal everyday activities (eg eating, drinking, brushing your teeth, picking up light objects), below shoulder height and within limits of discomfort. A gentle stretching feeling is ok, but stop if you feel any pain.

Try to spend some time sitting out of bed and walking (this is important to reduce your risk of getting a blood clot or pneumonia)

Deep breathing exercises are an important part of your recovery. Exaggerated deep breathing helps with relaxation, expanding your chest wall and preventing lung complications:

- Sit comfortably in a chair with feet well supported and back upright.
- Take a slow, deep breath in, expanding your chest and stomach like a balloon.
- Hold for 2-3 seconds
- Slowly breathe out
- Repeat 10 times every hour

## Arm exercises for day one

- Bending and straightening elbow/wrist/fingers
- Squeezing shoulder blades together
- Keeping your back straight and shoulders back when sitting/standing (ie not hunching)

## Arm and Shoulder Exercises

### Why do shoulder exercises after breast surgery?

- Help maintain normal shoulder movement and prevent shoulder stiffness
- Prevent scar tissue forming in your armpit

and shoulder (scar tissue can limit your arm movement in the long term).

- Help return to a normal healthy lifestyle
- Minimise risk of lymphedema if you have had axillary surgery

### What movements should I avoid?

- While the drain is in, you should avoid moving your arms above shoulder height. Whilst the drain is in, vigorous movement of the arms above the head may increase drain output so it should be avoided. Once the drain is out, you should move on to working through full shoulder range of motion. You should continue to do the exercises above and, if you have had a mastectomy or axillary clearance, refrain from lifting anything heavier than about 2kg during this time. If you have had a wide local excision, you can start doing exercises with weights as soon as your drains are out.
- It is safe to do light housework once you are home. A little discomfort is ok, but significant pain means you are doing too much.

### When should I do these exercises?

- Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe to start doing these exercises.
- Do them after taking appropriate pain relief, if needed. You might feel some tightness or stretching in your arm or armpit; this is quite normal. Discontinue if you are experiencing pain.

### How long should I do them for?

- Complete exercises 2-3 times a day when you go home.
- Do them until you have regained the same amount movement you had in your shoulder as before the operation. You have achieved full range of motion when you can move your arm on the operated side as far as the other arm, or as far as you could before the surgery.
- It is especially important to continue with the

exercises if you are having radiation therapy, as radiation therapy can cause fibrosis (contracture and shortening of skin and muscles)

- If you continue to have difficulty or pain moving your shoulder four weeks after surgery, discuss this with your surgeon and he or she may then refer you on for further rehabilitation/physiotherapy.

### Reasons to stop exercising

- Seroma (collection of fluid) under your arm, in your breast or in your chest wall
- Wound infection or problems healing
- Prolonged pain

### When should I seek further help?

It can take several weeks to regain normal

movement, but if you feel your shoulder has become 'stuck' and not improving despite exercise after **four weeks**, you should see your doctor or contact your physiotherapist.

### When can I start weights or strengthening exercises?

While resistance exercises are an important part of your recovery, it is important to check with your surgeon before commencing weight training.

Generally, from about 6 weeks after surgery, you can start to do upper limb exercises with light weights (500g to 1kg).

It is important to build up strengthening exercises *gradually*.

---

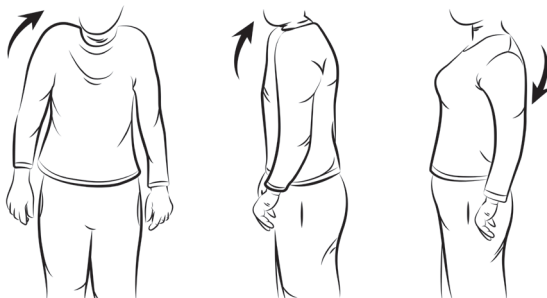
## Exercises To Do When Your Drains Are In

### Shoulder shrugs and circles

This is a good exercise to gently stretch your chest and shoulder muscles, and to make sure you are not tensing your neck and shoulder.

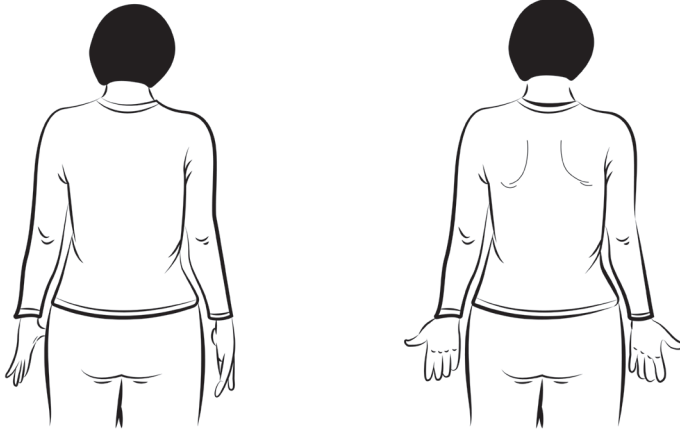
1. Stand or sit comfortably with your feet supported and arms relaxed at your sides.

2. Bring your shoulders forward, up, backward, and down. Try to make the circle as large as you can and move both shoulders at the same time.
3. If you feel stiff, begin with smaller circles but increase the size as it feels better.
4. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



## Shoulder blade squeeze

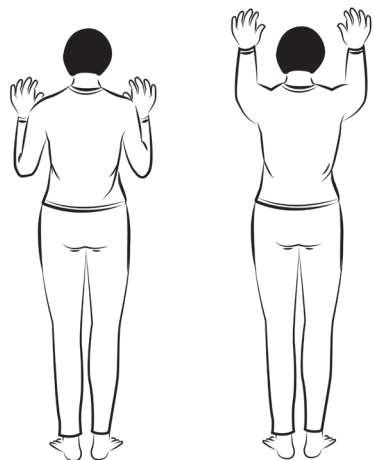
This helps to improve your posture, and allows your shoulder blades to be in the right position for you to move your arms overhead.



1. Sit or stand facing straight ahead. Your arms should be at your side with your palms facing inwards.
2. Open your chest, gently squeeze your shoulder blades towards your spine and down, and rotate your thumbs so your palms face forward.
3. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds whilst slowly breathing.
4. Relax and return to start position.
5. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

## Forward wall crawls

1. Stand facing the wall, making sure you are standing tall and your shoulder blades are back and down.
2. Place both hands on the wall.
3. Crawl your fingers up the wall until your elbows are the same height as your shoulder, or until you feel a stretch.
4. Slide your fingers back down the wall and repeat 5 times.

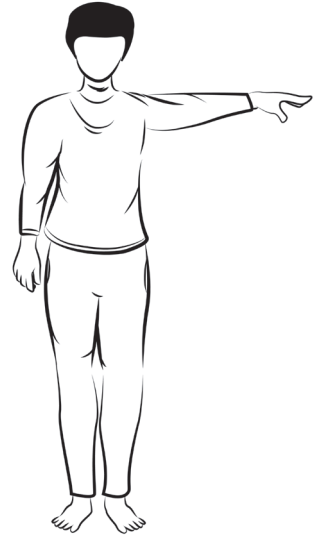


Progress to full range once your drains are removed.

## Side wall crawls

1. Stand with your operated side to the wall.
2. Crawl your fingers up the wall until your elbow is the same height as your shoulder, or until you feel a stretch.
3. Return to the starting position by crawling down the wall.
4. Repeat 5 times.

Progress to full range once your drains are removed.



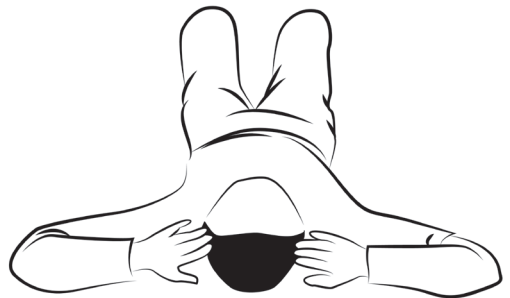
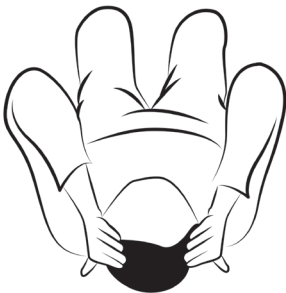
---

## Exercises to Add Once Your Drains Are Out

### Winging it

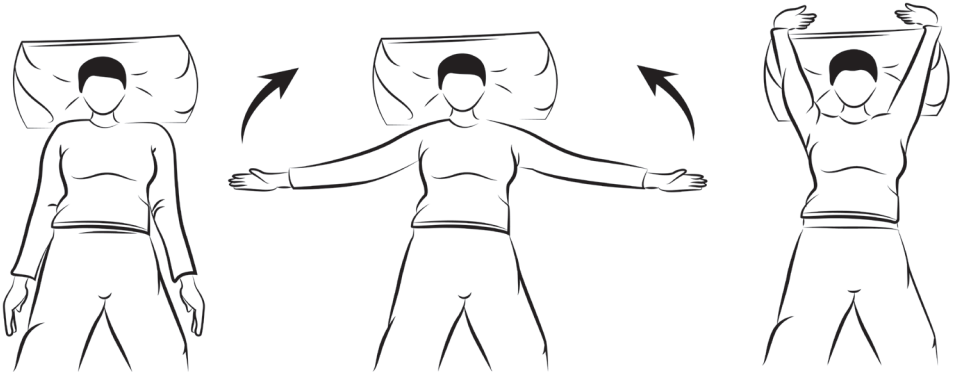
This exercise helps to prevent tightness across the front of your chest. The aim is to get your elbows close to the floor or bed.

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Press your fingertips to your ears with your elbows pointing to the ceiling.
2. Move your elbows apart and down to the bed. Hold.
3. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



## Snow angels

1. Lie on your back with your arms by your sides.
2. Move them up over your head, eventually touching your fingers and then move them back down to your thighs.
3. Repeat 5 times.



## Scar massage

When your drain and stitches are out and your wound is healed (ie no scabbed area - approx. 2 weeks after surgery), you should begin to massage your scar

### Why?

- To improve circulation
- To keep your scar soft
- To assist with your shoulder mobility

The area may be numb, sensitive or uncomfortable to touch as first, but should become less sensitive and tender the more you touch it

### How?

- Place two fingers over the scar and massage in circular movements,
- Massage gently at first, then become firm enough to move both the skin and the underlying tissue as you become more used to it

- Massage in towards your armpit (this will help remove excess fluid)
- Use lanolin or cream (eg vitamin E or sorbolene)
- Focus on any tight bands or hard nodules of scar tissue

**Do this for two minutes, twice a day.**

**DO NOT do this if there is an open wound or infection.**

## Returning to Driving

In order to return to driving, you must:

- Have all drains out
- Be off all sedating analgesia
- Be able to:
  - *Turn wheel fully*
  - *Wear seatbelt comfortably*
  - *Pull handbrake fully*
  - *Tolerate emergency stop*

# Remaining physically active

Cancer and treatment of cancer may increase risk of other conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and osteoporosis.

Remaining physically active can reduce the likelihood or impact these conditions have.

Physical activity during and/or following treatment for breast cancer:

- Improves cardiorespiratory and cardiovascular function
- Improves body composition (preservation/increase muscle mass, loss of fat mass, increase bone density)
- Improves immune function
- Improves strength/flexibility
- Improves body image, self-esteem and mood
- Reduces number and severity of side effects including
  - *Nausea*
  - *Fatigue*
  - *Pain*

Reduces stress, depression, anxiety

Participation in physical activity reduces risk of cancer recurrence by up to half compared with those who are sedentary

## Things to remember

- Some physical activity is better than none. More is generally better than less.
- Not being physically active during/following treatment can exacerbate some symptoms, such as fatigue.
- It can be helpful to have two exercise goals
  - *One that can be attained when side-effects are intense ('bad day')*
  - *One that is relevant when side-effects are less intense ('good day')*

## What type of exercise should I avoid?

Type of exercise	When to avoid
Swimming or public facilities (eg local gym)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● During periods of increased risk of infection</li><li>● <i>Low absolute neutrophil counts</i></li><li>● <i>When catheters/drains are being used</i></li><li>● <i>During wound recovery from surgery</i></li></ul>
High impact activities and contact sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Primary or metastatic bone cancer</li><li>● Low platelet counts</li><li>● Low haemoglobin</li><li>● Presence of bone pain</li></ul>

## How often should I exercise?

- Aerobic based exercise
- Walking, cycling, swimming
- At least 3-5 times/week
- For 20-30 minutes

## Resistance based exercise

- Body weight exercises, free weights
- 1-3 times/week
- 6-10 exercises, 1-4 sets of 6-12 reps

# More information

## Exercise Physiology

- The Living Room at Chris O'Brien Lifehouse offers Exercise Physiology consultations and group sessions to all patients who have been diagnosed with cancer
- Activity levels are gradually built up with the option of home-based or supervised programs tailored to your lifestyle and treatment history.
- Sessions generally include aerobic, muscle strengthening and mobility exercises
- Cost
  - 1 hour appointment is \$75
  - ½ hour appointment is \$55
  - Group sessions package 5 sessions for \$75 (\$15 per session)
  - Patients with private health insurance are able to claim their rebate
  - Patients who have a Chronic Disease Management Plan from their GP are able to claim a Medicare rebate
- Further information:
  - [http://www.mylifehouse.org.au/LivingRoom/Therapies/Exercise\\_physiology/](http://www.mylifehouse.org.au/LivingRoom/Therapies/Exercise_physiology/)
  - 85140038

## Dragons Abreast

- Dragonboat racing is a sport in which up to 20 people (2 abreast) paddle a canoe-like boat
- Dragons Abreast is an Australia-wide organisation of breast cancer survivors focused on spreading awareness, empowering individuals and educating on the benefits of remaining active after diagnosis
- Further information
  - <https://www.dragonsabreast.com.au/>
  - 1300 889 566
  - [office@dragonsabreast.org.au](mailto:office@dragonsabreast.org.au)

## YWCA Encore

- Free 8-week program specifically tailored for women who have experienced mastectomy, lumpectomy or breast reconstruction surgery at any time in their lives

- Land and pool-based exercises to strengthen arms, improve general fitness and relieve symptoms
- 12 locations in Sydney Metro Area
- Who is eligible?
  - >8 weeks post-breast surgery
  - Need medical approval from GP, oncologist or surgeon before participating
  - Further information
  - <http://www.ywcaencore.org.au/>
  - 1800 305 150

## Enrich (Cancer Council)

- Developed by Cancer Council NSW and University of Newcastle
- For cancer survivors and their partners, family and carers
- Focuses on
  - Making healthy food choices
  - Including physical activity in daily life
  - Making informed lifestyle choices
- Delivered by a Physiotherapist/Exercise Physiologist and Dietitian
- 2 hours per week for 6 weeks
- Further information:
  - <http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/57676/local-services/metro-sydney-region/services-support-metro-sydney-region/enrich/>
  - 1300 360 541
  - [nrich@nswcc.org.au](mailto:nrich@nswcc.org.au)

## Sydney Survivorship Centre

- A dedicated team of multidisciplinary professionals to support individuals following a cancer diagnosis
- Provides educational resources and holds public forums/events/workshops
- Further information
  - <http://www.slhd.nsw.gov.au/concord/Cancer/survivorship.html>
  - 9767 6354