

Physiotherapy After Breast Surgery

Surrey Memorial Hospital

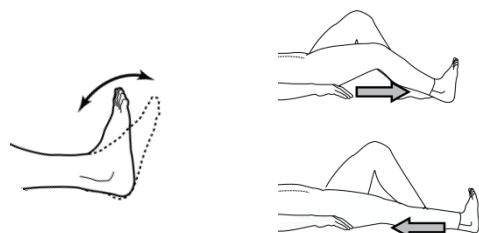
Breathing Exercises

After surgery, it is important to do deep breathing exercises. This will keep your lungs healthy.

Take a deep breath in through your nose slowly, hold for 3 seconds, and breathe out through your mouth. Repeat 10 times every hour while you are awake. Then cough to clear any mucus. Support your incision firmly with a pillow to make it more comfortable.

Leg Exercises

It is important to keep the blood moving in your body to prevent getting a blood clot.



Pump your feet up and down at the ankles. Also bend your legs up and down in bed. Do both exercises 10 times every hour while you are awake until you are back to your daily activities.

Arm Exercises

Arm exercises will help with your shoulder motion, pain, and swelling. We give you a list of arm exercise to do after your surgery.

For the first 6 weeks after surgery, do not do any heavy lifting (more than 10 lb) with your operated arm.

For the first 3 to 6 months after surgery, do not do push-ups this puts too much strain on your shoulders.

Walking

A nurse will help you get out of bed and start walking. This helps keep your lungs clear and blood moving. Once home continue to progress how far you walk. Physical activity after breast cancer diagnosis may reduce recurrence risk. The greatest benefit has been shown in women who walked 3 to 5 hours per week at an average speed. Ask your physiotherapist about the best way to increase your physical activity.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema is swelling in the arm, breast, or chest that can happen after breast surgery. Normally your body gets rid of extra fluid through the 'lymph nodes'. The lymph nodes of the arm, breast, and chest are in the armpit. Breast surgery and/or radiation therapy can change the lymph nodes and allow fluid to build up.

If you get lymphedema, you may notice swelling in your arm, breast, or chest. Your arm may feel heavy and tight. You may also feel pain in your shoulder.

Not everyone gets lymphedema after breast surgery. Some people get it right away. Others get it months or years later. If you think you have lymphedema, see your physiotherapist or doctor. It is easier to treat if we catch it early.

During the Pre-admission Clinic, your physiotherapist measures the size of both arms and reviews healthy habits for people at risk for lymphedema. Your physiotherapist will re-measure at your follow-up visits to see if there are any changes.

Scar Management

As your body is healing, you will have scar tissue and swelling around your incision. You can help it heal properly by doing scar massage. This will 'loosen up' the scar tissue and swelling so it does not get tight and "stick" to the tissue underneath. Your physiotherapist will show you how to do the massage.

Start about 2 to 4 weeks after your surgery, when the scar has healed and it is not too tender. Use the pads of your fingers. Make gentle circular motions along the length of the scar. Continue for 3 to 4 minutes. A moisturizing lotion may help. Do this every day for 3 to 4 months until your scar feels loose and there is no pain.

Axillary Web Syndrome (Cording)

In the early weeks after surgery, some women have pain that feels like a tight cord running from their armpit down their arm. This is called axillary web syndrome (or cording).

Axillary web syndrome appears as tender, cord-like structures below your skin in the armpit area and down your arm and may go as far as your wrist. If you have cording, it might be hard to reach objects overhead, lift your arm and straighten your elbow. We don't know the cause of cording. The cords may be part of the lymphatic system or small veins that have been damaged during surgery.

If you get cording, keep doing your daily stretching to the point of feeling a pull, not pain and contact your physiotherapist. In most cases, cording goes away on its own over time.

At Home

You will have 2 to 3 follow-up appointments with the physiotherapist after your surgery: at around 1 month, 6 months, and 12 months (if needed) after surgery. The physiotherapy department will call you at home with the date and time. All appointments will be at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

At these appointments, your physiotherapist will:

- Measure the size of your arms to check for swelling.
- Go over scar massage.
- Check the strength and movement in your arms.
- Progress your exercises.

If there are any problems such as stiffness and/or swelling in your arm, you will get treatment for it. If there are no problems, you will only return for your next follow-up appointment.

It is important to keep these appointments. It is easier to treat lymphedema and/or joint stiffness earlier rather than later.

Surrey Memorial Hospital
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