

Exercises after surgery

A guide for people who have
had breast cancer surgery



Download this
poster and use it
as a reference
when you do you
exercises.

Exercises after breast surgery

This poster describes how to perform arm and shoulder exercises after breast surgery. Exercise is an important part of your treatment and recovery. It aims to gradually improve the movement of your arm and shoulder after surgery and help get you back to your usual activities.

Getting started

Talk to your doctor, breast care nurse, nurse or physiotherapist before starting the exercises illustrated in this poster.

The timelines suggested are a guide only and the time that is right for you will vary – your health care team will let you know which exercises to do and when to do them.

Level one exercises can be started the day after surgery. You can usually use your affected arm

normally, up to shoulder height, for light activities from the day after your surgery.

Level two exercises can be started after the drains have been removed or when your doctor/physiotherapist says that you are able to move your shoulder.

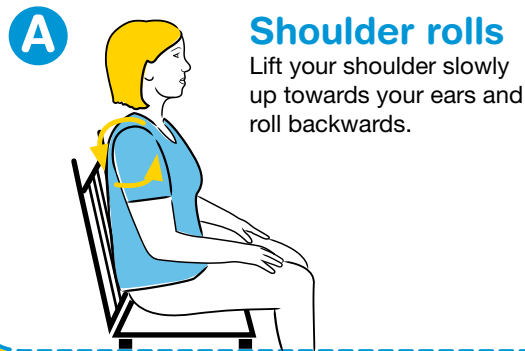
These exercises should not cause pain. Let your doctor or breast care nurse know if you experience any pain or discomfort.

For support and information on cancer and cancer-related issues, call Cancer Council 13 11 20. This is a confidential service.

Level one exercises

These gentle exercises increase your ability to move your arm and shoulder and improve circulation.

Level one exercises can be done while lying on a bed or sitting in a chair. When you are not doing the exercises you may find it comfortable to rest your arm on a pillow.

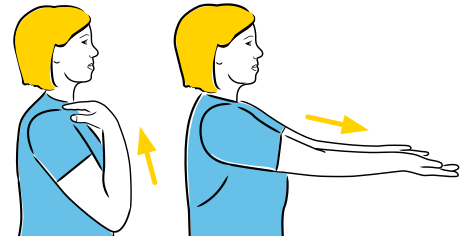


A Shoulder rolls

Lift your shoulder slowly up towards your ears and roll backwards.

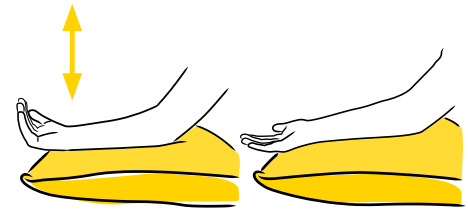
B Elbow stretch

Bend your elbow and touch your shoulder with your hand. Then straighten your elbow completely.



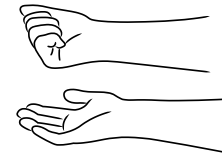
C Wrist exercise

Support your elbow on a pillow. Keep your hand relaxed and your arm by your side then bend your wrist back and forth.



D Hand squeeze

Make a fist and squeeze slowly and gently open fingers out and relax.

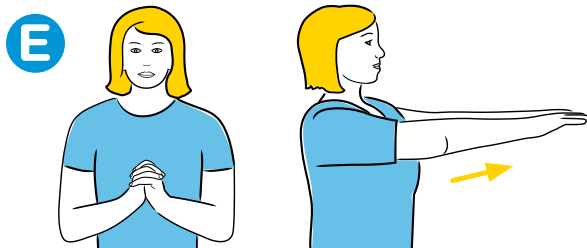


Repeat each exercise 10 times, at least 4 times a day

Level two exercises

These exercises help make your arm stronger and ease the tightness in your chest and shoulder muscles. They will help you gradually regain normal shoulder movement if done regularly.

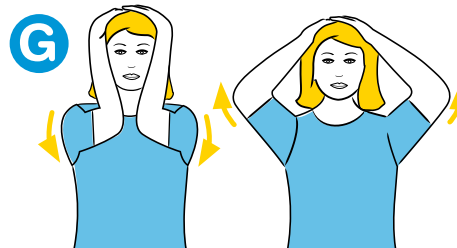
Use your arm for combing your hair, getting dressed, putting on make-up and reaching for light objects – it will improve your arm movements. See a physiotherapist if you have trouble doing your exercises.



E Arm stretch

Clasp your hands together in front of your chest, keeping your elbows in. Using your strong arm to help, stretch both arms until your elbows are

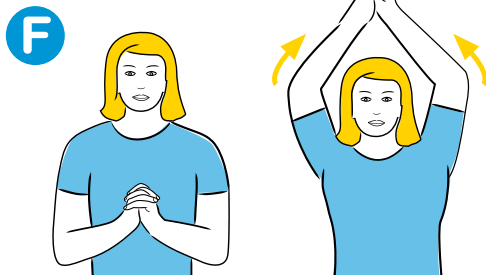
straight out in front at shoulder height then return to your chest. Pull your shoulder blades back as you pull your elbows back.



G Hands on head

Take your hands, still clasped together, to the top of your head. Slowly and gently bring your elbows together and then stretch your elbows backwards.

Be aware of pulling your shoulders back towards the bed but don't poke your neck forward. At first this exercise will be easier if you lie down. Hold for 5–10 seconds.



F Arm lift

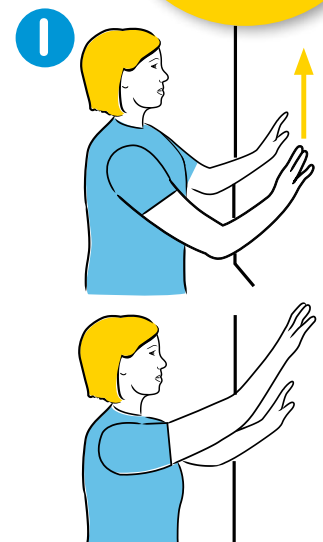
Keep pushing your hands together so that they support each other as you lift your arms over your head. Continue the support as you lower your hands back towards your hips.

The movement should be continuous and aim to reach your hands above your head within your comfort level. This will be easier to control if you start this exercise lying down.



H Hands behind neck

With your head upright and hands clasped behind your neck, stretch your elbows backward. Hold for 5–10 seconds to stretch the muscles on your chest wall. Try not to bend your upper body while doing this exercise.



I Wall crawl

Stand facing the wall with your toes about 20–25cm from the wall. Place both hands on the wall at elbow height. Use your fingers to crawl up the wall, going as far as you can.

Slowly slide your hands back down the wall and relax. Mark this spot with tape to see how you're going.

You can rest in this position, but make sure that your arms are well supported so that the chest muscles can let go. It will help stretch scar tissue and assist with arm drainage.