



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Physiotherapy advice and exercises following Breast Reconstruction using Latissimus Dorsi Flap

Issued by the Physiotherapy Department

The purpose of this leaflet is to inform you of how Physiotherapy can help you after your operation.

You are having some surgery to reconstruct your breast using muscle tissue and skin from your back, and possibly an implant or expander placed under the muscle on your chest wall.

You may also be having surgery on the other breast for symmetry. You will be given a separate advice leaflet about the exercises you should do for this side.

This booklet contains advice regarding exercises following this type of operation. You must follow this advice for the next few weeks.

It is very important that you do not over use your arm until the wounds have healed. It is also important that you do not let your shoulder become stiff.

The exercises you do should be gentle. They should be started the day after your operation.

Once you return home you should gradually increase the exercises to improve your posture and function.

It is normal to feel tired after an operation. Accept and seek help as you require it. Take rest when you need one.

When do I start my exercises?

Breathing exercises

These exercises should be started on the day of your operation. While you are awake, you should take 3-4 deep breaths followed by a cough, every hour until you are up and walking around.

Deep breathing exercises

Take a deep breath in through your nose filling your lungs as much as you can, hold, then slowly let the air out. You should feel your stomach rise as you breathe in, and as you breathe out it should fall.

Huffing or coughing.

You can help to move any phlegm (secretions) that are in your chest by forcing out a breath (huffing). If you need to cough, to help reduce discomfort, support over the operated area with your hands.

Circulatory Exercises.

These exercises should be started on the day of your operation. Gentle leg exercises are a good way to improve your circulation while your mobility is limited. They can help to reduce the risk of blood clots in the deep veins. You can do these as often as you wish.

- Pointing your toes to the ceiling, then away from you.
- One at a time, gently bend and straighten your knees.
- Tighten your thigh muscles by pushing your knee down into the bed. Hold for three seconds, then relax.
- Clench your buttocks together, hold for three, then relax.

Are there any movements I should avoid after my surgery?

There are certain exercises and movements you should **avoid** until your wounds have healed, otherwise you could damage your new breast. It is important that you do not stretch or use the muscle which has been taken from your back to make your new breast until it has had a chance to heal.

For the first 3-4 weeks after your surgery you should avoid:-

- Stretching your arm above your head (either forwards or sideways) or behind your back.
- Pushing open doors with the affected arm.
- Lifting or carrying anything heavy with the affected arm.
- Fastening your bra behind your back. You should fasten it at the front then swivel it around behind you.
- Driving.

If in doubt, don't do it.

Wait for help, or telephone the hospital for advice.

You may be advised to increase your movement more quickly if you are being too protective, the shoulder joint is becoming stiff, you have undergone previous surgery shortly before the reconstruction, or you have to start radiotherapy soon after surgery.

You may be advised to limit your movement if the wound is slow to heal or if you have had an extended Latissimus Dorsi Reconstruction.

When should I start my Shoulder Exercises?

These should be started the day after your surgery. Try to do them about 4 times a day with about 5 - 10 repetitions each time. Remember to work within your pain limits – do not force any movements. Continue these exercises until your Physiotherapy review appointment.

Exercises 1, 2, 3 and 4 can be done in sitting:-

1. Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, and then relax them.



2. Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, then circle them back and down. Try taking some deep breaths while doing this.

3. Place your hands on your shoulders. Slowly circle your elbows. Aim to get your elbows to shoulder height.



4. Place hand on shoulder. Slowly raise your elbow forwards up to shoulder height. Then lower it down.



5. Place your hands on your shoulders. Slowly raise your elbow up to the side to shoulder height.



6. With your arms by your sides, move your shoulders forwards and backwards.



Exercise 7 can be done in sitting or standing:-

7. Pendular exercise. Begin this exercise when your drains have been removed. Let your affected arm hang down by your side. Swing the arm in small, relaxed circles. When your wound is well healed, progress to standing. When leaning forward, support the breast with the opposite hand.



How can I reduce my risk of developing Lymphoedema?

By achieving a good range of movement at your shoulder, keeping your skin in good condition, making sure that any cuts or scratches to the arm do not become infected, avoiding injections and blood pressure taking on the affected side, you can help to reduce your risk of developing Lymphoedema.

When can I return to normal activities?

Unless you have been given specific instructions about limiting your activities and exercises, you can start to use your arm more normally about 4 weeks after your surgery within a pain free range.

Massage moisturiser into the scars and across your back once all the wounds are healed and dry.

Do not use the affected arm for heavy housework, e.g. vacuuming, or heavy lifting for approximately 3 months after your surgery. After this time you can start to use your arm normally.

After 3 months you can start to resume sports activities, including swimming, keep fit and yoga. Check with your Physiotherapist if you want to start anything sooner. Driving can be resumed at 4-6 weeks if your wounds are well healed and you are confident at handling the car and using the handbrake.

What should I do if I have problems with my arm movement?

It is normal for your back and arm to feel tight for several months after the operation.

A Physiotherapy review will be arranged following your surgery to progress your exercises. If you have any problems you should contact your Physiotherapist.

Name _____

Tel number _____

Support Contact Numbers

Breast Care Physiotherapists

North Tyneside General Hospital	0191 2934064
Wansbeck General Hospital	01670 564010 / 564011
Hexham General Hospital	01434 655031

Breast Care Practitioners

Wansbeck General Hospital	01670 529391 / 529636
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Breast Care Nurses

North Tyneside General Hospital	0191 2934183
Wansbeck General Hospital	01670 529319
Hexham General Hospital	01434 655386

Breast Cancer Care Helpline	080 8800 6000
Breast Cancer Care Website	
www.breastcancercare.org.uk	

Macmillan Cancer Relief Helpline	0845 601 6161
Macmillan Cancer Relief Website	www.macmillan.org.uk

Breast Cancer Campaign	www.breastcare.co.uk
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Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

www.northumbria.nhs.uk

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