

Arm & shoulder exercises after surgery

A guide for people who have had breast cancer surgery



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Arm & shoulder exercises: A guide for people who have had breast cancer surgery is reviewed approximately every three years.

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Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This poster is intended as a general introduction to the topic and should not be seen as a substitute for medical, legal or financial advice. You should obtain independent advice relevant to your specific situation from appropriate professionals, and you may wish to discuss issues raised in this book with them.

All care is taken to ensure that the information in this poster is accurate at the time of publication. Please note that information on cancer, including the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of cancer, is constantly being updated and revised by medical professionals and the research community. Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this poster.



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

Talk to your doctor about when it is safe for you to begin other types of exercise, such as aerobic and strength-training exercises. A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can then help you develop an individual exercise program. For a free copy of Cancer Council's *Exercise for People Living with Cancer* booklet, call 13 11 20 or visit your local Cancer Council website.

With these exercises, you should regain most arm and shoulder movement and function one month after the operation. If improvement is slow, or if you have trouble doing the exercises, your doctor, physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can give you different exercises to try.

These exercises help make your arm stronger and ease the tightness in your chest and shoulder muscles. All can be done lying down, sitting in a chair or standing up, except for the wall crawl (exercise I), which works best standing up.

Use your arm for combing your hair, getting dressed, putting on make-up and reaching for light objects – it will improve your arm movements.

Level two exercises

- A** Shoulder rolls
- B** Elbow stretch
- C** Wrist exercise
- D** Hand squeeze

These exercises are illustrated on the reverse of this page.

Level one exercises

- E** Arm stretch
- F** Arm lift
- G** Hands on head
- H** Hands behind neck
- I** Wall crawl

These exercises are illustrated on the reverse of this page.

Arm & shoulder exercises after breast cancer surgery

This poster describes how to perform arm and shoulder exercises after surgery for breast cancer. The exercises aim to gradually improve the movement of your arm and shoulder and help get you back to your usual activities.

Getting started

Talk to your doctor, breast care nurse, nurse, physiotherapist or exercise physiologist 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 health care professionals say you can move your shoulder.

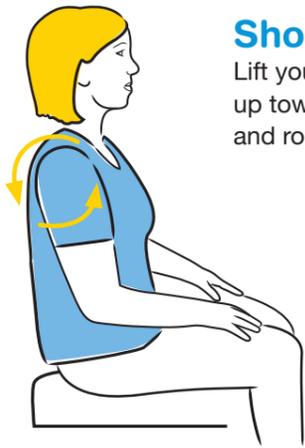
These exercises should not cause pain. Let your doctor or breast care nurse know if you experience any pain or discomfort.



Level one exercises

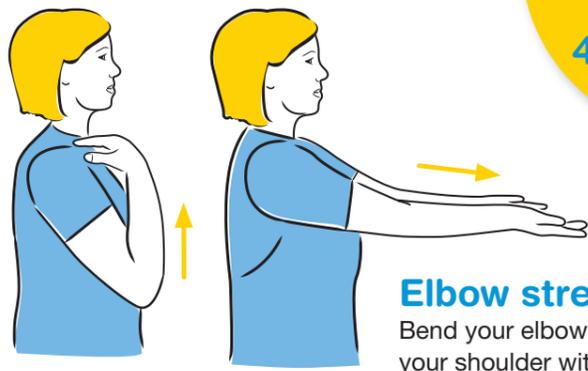
Gradually build up to doing each exercise 10 times 4 times a day

A



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

B



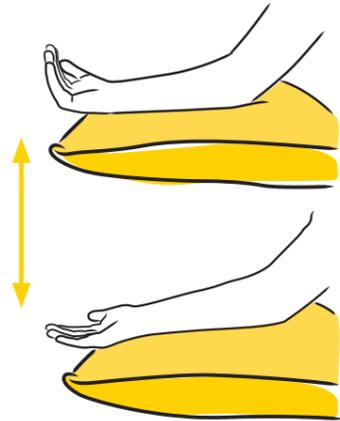
Elbow stretch

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

C

Wrist exercise

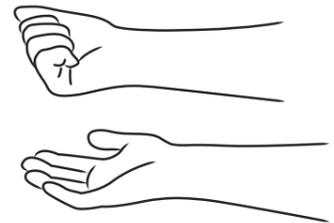
Support your elbow on a pillow. Keep your hand relaxed and your arm by your side, then bend your wrist back and forth.



D

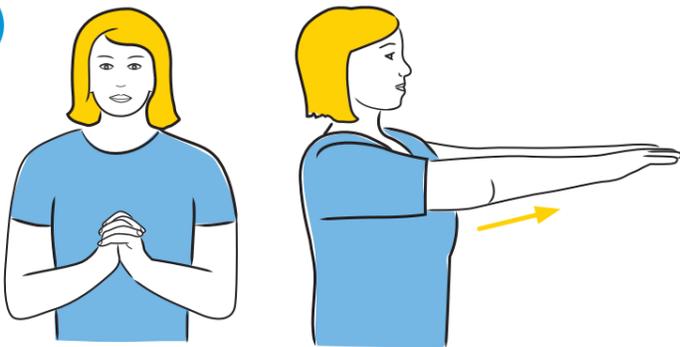
Hand squeeze

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



Level two exercises

E

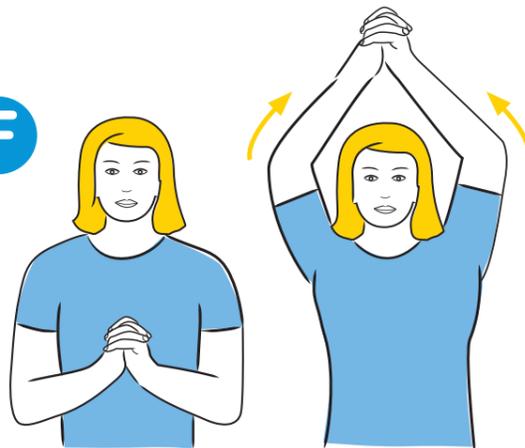


Arm stretch

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 shoulderblades back as you pull back your elbows.

F

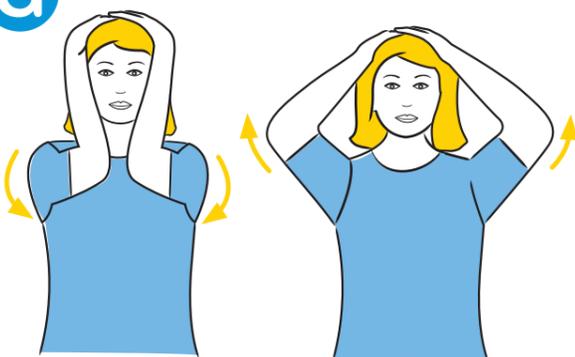


Arm lift

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

The movement should be continuous. 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.

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 but don't poke your neck forward. At first this exercise will be easier if you lie down. Hold for 5–10 seconds.

H

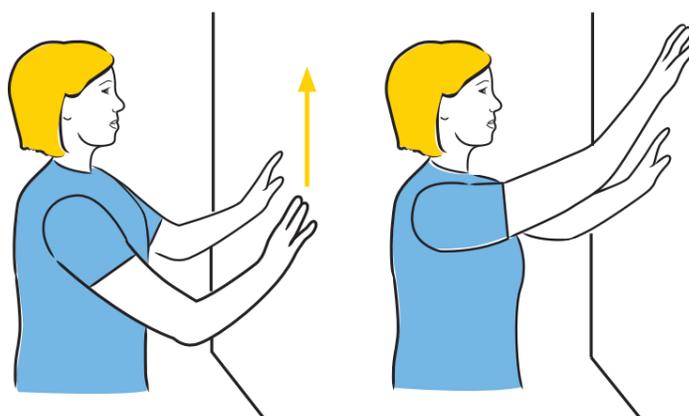


Hands behind neck

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

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

I



Wall crawl

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

Slowly slide your hands back down the wall and relax. You may want to mark how high you can reach.

Gradually build up to doing each exercise 10 times 4 times a day