

Exercises after Breast Reconstruction using implants

Physiotherapy & Occupational Therapy

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

Why you need to do exercises

The aim of exercising after breast reconstruction surgery is to help you get back to your normal activities and a full range of movement. It takes time to get over surgery and you are likely to feel tired at first. The exercises will help to keep you moving and stop your shoulder or scar getting too stiff or tight.

Begin by doing some gentle exercises and slowly build up to full movement over a number of weeks. This allows time for your body to heal. You can usually use your affected arm normally, up to shoulder height, for light activities from the day after your surgery. Your doctor or nurse will let you know if there is any reason for you not to do this.

Listen to your body. If you feel tired and achy you may need to slow down. Your shoulder and chest may feel tight and uncomfortable but you should not have uncontrollable pain. If you do have pain, stop and contact your surgeon.

The information in this leaflet is reproduced with kind permission from Cancer Research UK: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/breast-cancer/treatment/surgery/breast-reconstruction/exercises-implants>.

© Cancer Research UK [2024] All right reserved. Information taken 21/08/2025.

Always check with your surgeon before doing these exercises. They may want you to do other exercises or use slightly different time scales.

Things not to do in the first 2 weeks

- There are some things you should try to avoid doing during the first 2 weeks after surgery
- Your surgeon may suggest slightly different timings, so check if you are unsure
- Do not lift your arm above the height of your shoulder or stretch behind your back
- Do not lift anything heavier than a bag of sugar

You might not realise that some everyday things can strain your muscles. Avoid doing any of the following with your arm on the side of your surgery:

- Pushing yourself up off the bed
- Pushing doors open
- Pulling things towards you, such as pulling washing out of the washing machine

Avoiding these things helps your muscles to slowly stretch and heal. The implant has been placed under the muscle at the front of your chest. It stretches the chest muscle more than usual. By avoiding the movements listed above, the implant will not move and you will not overstretch the muscle or the wound. So it can all heal and settle down.

When you are fastening your bra, do it up at the front, swivel it round, and put your arm on the side you had surgery in first. When you put your coat on, make sure you put the side you had surgery in the armhole first.

The first 2 weeks after surgery

During the first few weeks, maintaining a good posture and doing the exercises below helps to stop your shoulder and arm getting stiff. This helps you get back to normal activities. Always, check with your surgeon about when you can do these exercises.

It is a good idea to do some gentle physical activity, such as walking. This will help build up your strength.

Maintain a good posture

Try to maintain a good posture when you are doing the exercises below. This helps to stop you becoming round-shouldered and helps to strengthen your muscles. You can do this by:

- Imagining you have a piece of string pulling you up tall from the ceiling
- Thinking 'tall and straight'
- Lifting your chest up

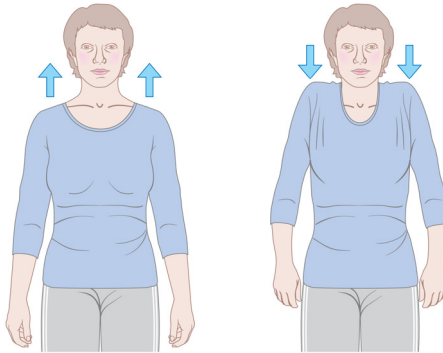
Exercises

These exercises help to stop you developing stiffness in your arm and shoulder in the first 1 to 2 weeks. They also help get you back to moving your arm normally while giving you time to heal.

Shoulder shrugs

Relax your shoulders. Lift your shoulders up towards your ears slowly and gently. Then slowly relax them back down.

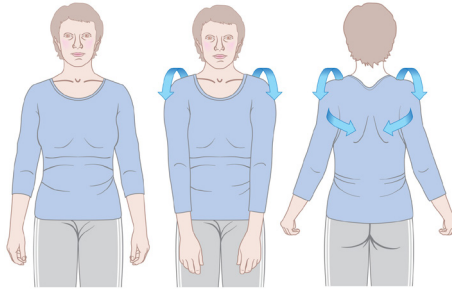
Start with 5 of these every hour and gradually build up to 10 every hour over the first three weeks.



Cancer Research UK

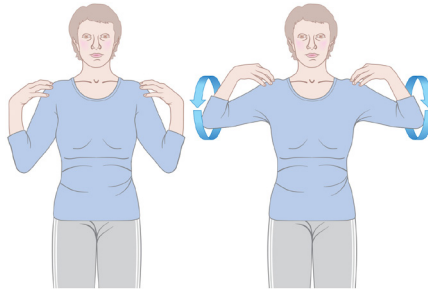
Shoulder rolls

Relax your shoulders. Roll your shoulders forwards and then slowly backwards. When you roll them backwards, squeeze the shoulder blades together at the back. Take a deep breath as you do each exercise. Start with doing 5 of these every hour and gradually build up to 10. Repeat every hour over the first 3 weeks.



Cancer Research UK

Shoulder raise

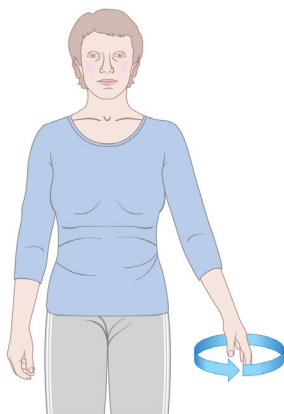


Cancer Research UK

Place your fingertips onto your shoulders. Slowly raise the elbow up to the side, and then move it clockwise or forwards, gently circling your arm. You are aiming to get your elbow level with your shoulder. You may not be able to do this at first but Do not worry. Try to increase the height each time you do the exercises until you get level with your shoulder. Then repeat it the other way.

Start with 5 and build up to 10 in each direction. Repeat every 2 or 3 hours over the course of the next 3 weeks.

Arm swings

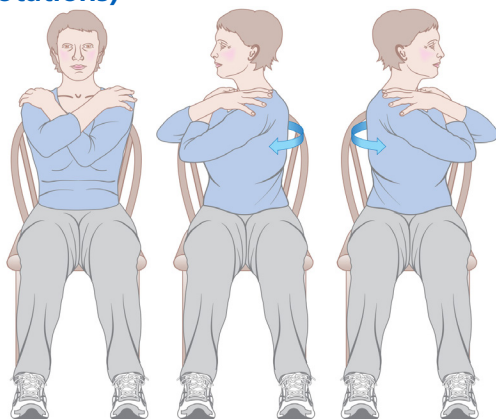


Cancer Research UK

With your arm hanging down slightly in front of you or to the side, slowly draw imaginary circles and lines on the floor. Start with small circles and increase the size as it feels comfortable to do so. This keeps the armpit area moving.

Start with 5 and build up to 10 in each direction over the next 3 weeks. Repeat every 2 or 3 hours.

Body turns (rotations)



Cancer Research UK

Cross your arms across your body so that your hands are placed lightly on your shoulders. Slowly turn to look to the left and then to the right.

Start with 5 and build up to 10 in each direction over the course of 3 weeks. Repeat every 2 or 3 hours.

Returning to normal activities

In the first 1 to 2 weeks, you can use your arm normally up to shoulder height for light activities, such as face washing, hair brushing, eating etc. But avoid lifting your arm above the height of your shoulder. Do not lift anything heavy, but you can use your arm to lift a cup of tea.

It is good to get moving about as soon as possible. Gentle walking can help to maintain your fitness, will help you to heal, and make you feel better.

When you are sitting, try to change position regularly. This can help to stop you stiffening up.

You can have sex but Do not lift your arms above your shoulder.

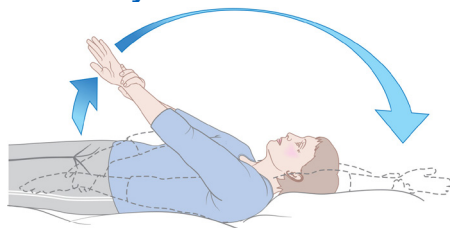
From 3 to 4 weeks after surgery

Check with your surgeon about when you can start these exercises. They might want you to follow slightly different timescales.

Continue with the exercises you have been doing. And you can now start the following exercises to help you get back to a full range of movement in your shoulder. It is normal to feel tight and bruised across your chest wall. This improves as you continue with the exercises and start on the ones below.

For the exercises below, start with doing 5 of each every 2 to 3 hours. Work up to 10 of each of them over the next two weeks. You need to start gradually and slowly so that you Do not strain your arm.

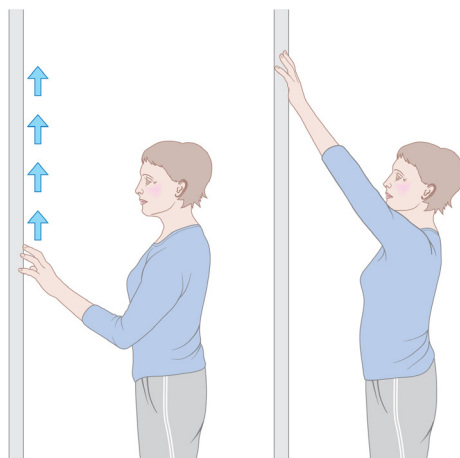
Lifting your arm above your head



Cancer Research UK

Lie on your back and hold your arm on the side you had the operation with your other hand. Gently lift your arms as far as you can above your head. When you can do this easily, do it sitting in a chair.

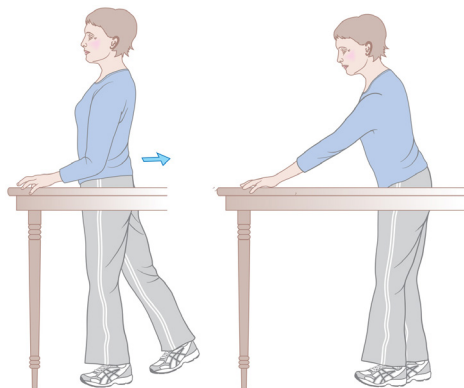
Walking your fingers up the wall



Cancer Research UK

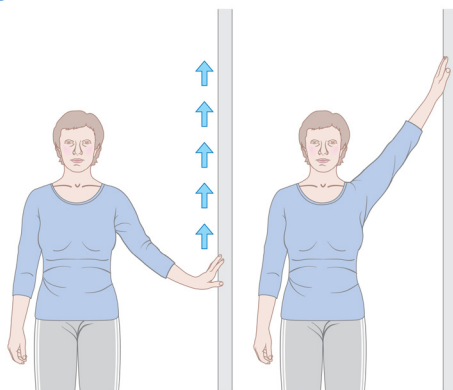
Stand facing a wall and walk your fingers up it slowly. You may feel tightness, but it shouldn't be painful. If it is very painful, tell your specialist physiotherapist or breast care nurse.

If you find this exercise difficult, stand with the side you had your operation next to a worktop. Standing still, put your hand on the worktop and slowly walk your body backwards keeping your hand where it is.



Cancer Research UK

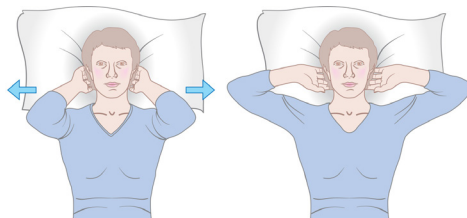
Walk your fingers up the wall sideways



Cancer Research UK

Stand with the side you had the operation next to the wall. Walk your fingers up the wall so that the palm of your hand is facing the wall.

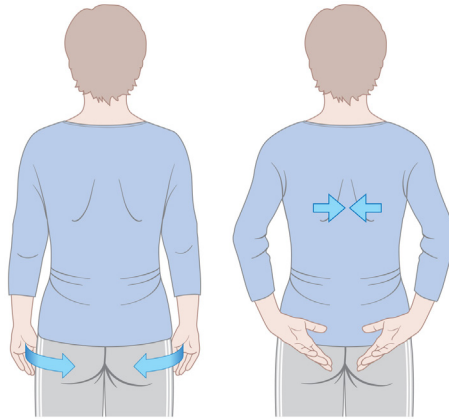
Beach pose



Cancer Research UK

Lie on your back. Put your fingers lightly on your ears, with your elbows pointing up towards the ceiling. Slowly let your elbows fall back so that you end up with your head on your arms: a bit like when you are lying on a beach.

Chest stretch



Cancer Research UK

Stand up, keeping your arms relaxed and straight by your side. Then slowly take your arms behind you, as if you are trying to touch your hands together at the back.

You can now start to do normal things such as housework, gradually building up the amount. You can usually start to drive, as long as you can do an emergency stop and manage the gear stick and handbrake. Always check with your insurance company before driving.

At 6 weeks

After 6 weeks you should be able to do most normal activities. Heavy lifting might still be difficult. If you are struggling to build up strength you might need some extra exercises from a specialist physiotherapist. If you do not have a physiotherapist, you can ask to be referred to your local physiotherapy outpatient department for advice and guidance.

Keep trying to maintain and build up your general fitness levels. Keep walking and start to increase the distance and pace gradually. The amount you will be able to do will depend on your fitness levels before your surgery.

Keep doing the exercises, even when you have full movement in your shoulder. This is especially important if you have had, or are going to have radiotherapy. On some days your shoulder might feel stiffer than on others. This is quite normal and can last for between a year and 18 months. Rarely, it can last for longer.

When to ask for help

You should contact your surgeon, breast care nurse, or physiotherapist if you have any of the following at any point:

- Any redness or heat in your breast.
- Swelling
- Severe pain
- Worsening movement of your arm
- Difficulty doing the exercises
- Change in shape of the new breast
- Increasing tightness across your shoulder
- Shortness of breath that is not resolving
- Any redness, pain, heat or swelling in the calf or thigh

Fluid can build up around your breast or under your arm. This is called a seroma. It can be uncomfortable and may need draining. Contact your breast care nurse or surgeon if you think you are developing a seroma.

If you have any of the signs above, you may need to reduce the number of exercises that you are doing or find a different way of doing them. If you are worried, please speak to your breast care nurse, consultant, GP or physiotherapist (if you have access to one).

Contact Details

Sarah Haw

Macmillan Specialist Physiotherapist in Oncology, Haematology and Palliative Care

Therapy Services @ The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

Tel: 01902 307999 – Ext 5597/5211 or Bleep 7295

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。