

# Exercises after breast or upper body lymph node surgery

Surgery may limit the strength and movement of your arm. These exercises are helpful if you have had:

- breast surgery with or without lymph node removal
- melanoma surgery with axillary lymph node removal

If you have had a breast removed your arm and shoulder may feel stiff and the skin may feel tight. Your balance may be off causing stiffness in your head and neck.

All exercises should be done slowly and controlled.  
Pain is not the goal, only light stretching.

## Doing these exercises after surgery:

- will help restore the movement and strength of your arm and shoulder
- decrease the stiffness and restore the movement of your head and neck
- may prevent, control or decrease pain
- may prevent, control or decrease swelling
- will make it easier to receive radiation therapy if needed

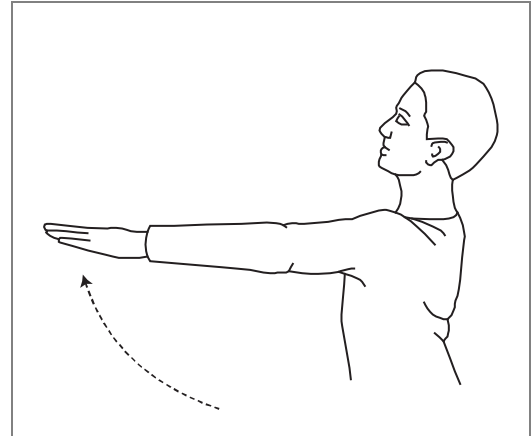
Do not over work yourself with these exercises. Stop and rest if you feel tired or pain. If the exercises cause your arm or shoulder to become more sore, you have probably done too much.

When you start your exercises after your surgery it is a good idea to take your pain medication about 30 minutes before you begin. Each day try to go a little further with each exercise. You can continue with all of these exercises so long as you are comfortable. The exercise instructions are explained in the handout.

## 1 to 6 days after surgery

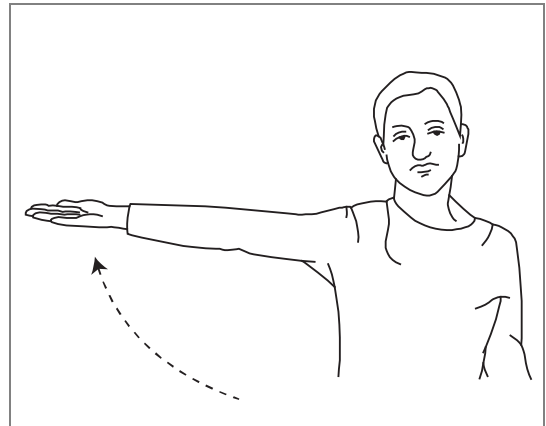
### Lift arm straight up in front of you.

- Stop at 90° – there should be no pain.
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 2 to 3 times a day.



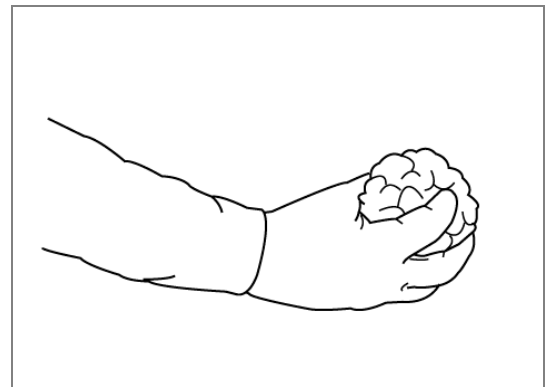
### Lift arm straight out to the side.

- Stop at 90° – there should be no pain.
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 2 to 3 times a day.



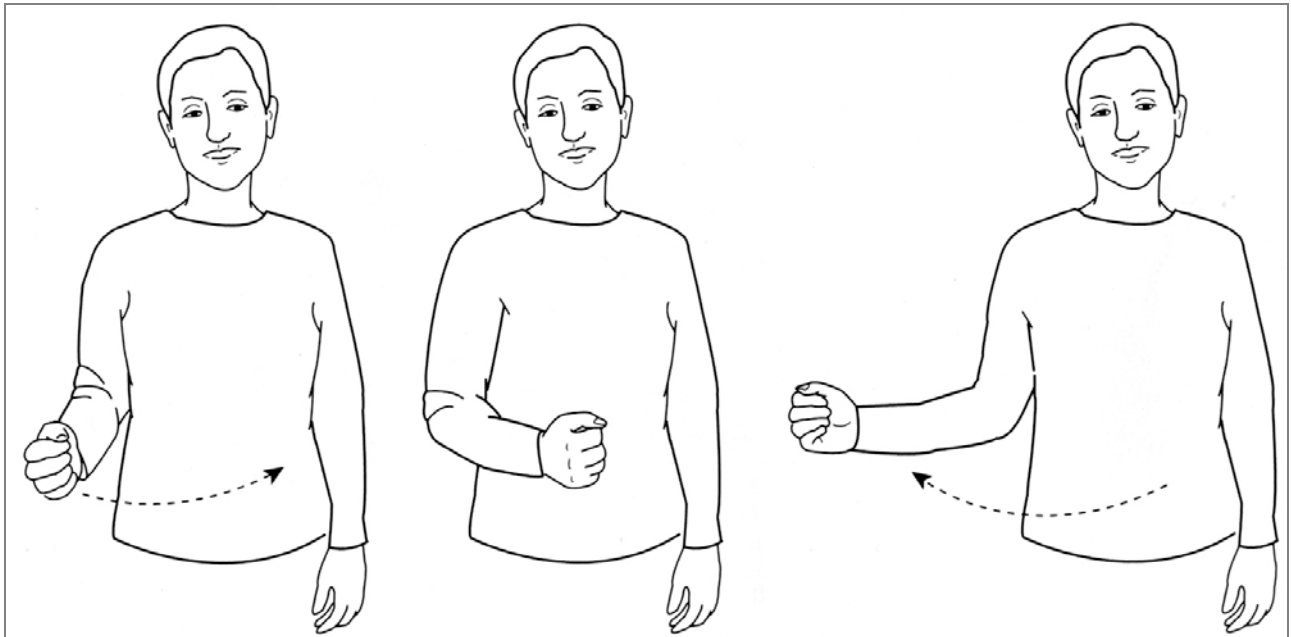
### Hand pumping and ball squeezing.

- Make and release a fist or hold a soft ball in your hand.
- Squeeze and relax.
- Do up to 20 times.
- Do the exercise 2 to 3 times a day.



## Arm movement

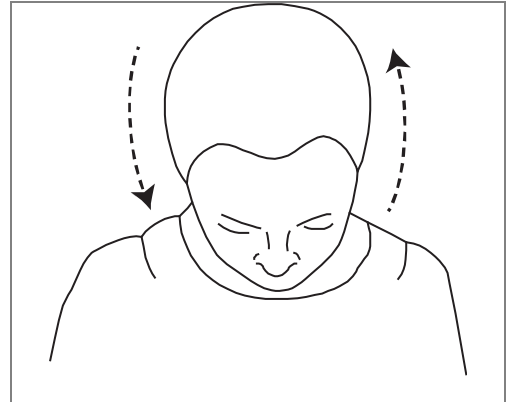
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 3 times a day.



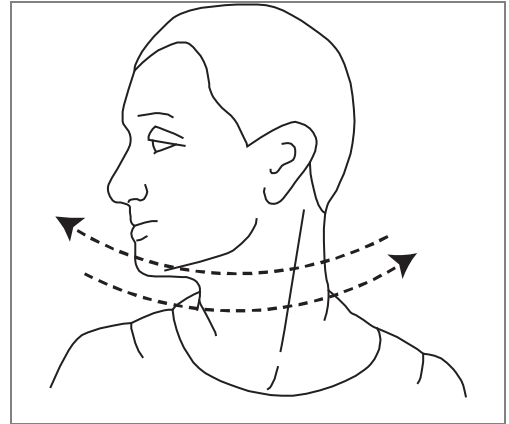
- Start with your elbow beside your body, your arm bent 90° so that your hand is level with your elbow.
- Slowly bring your hand in towards your chest, keeping your elbow by your side.
- Move your hand away from your body as far as you can comfortably go. Stop if you feel pain.

## Neck

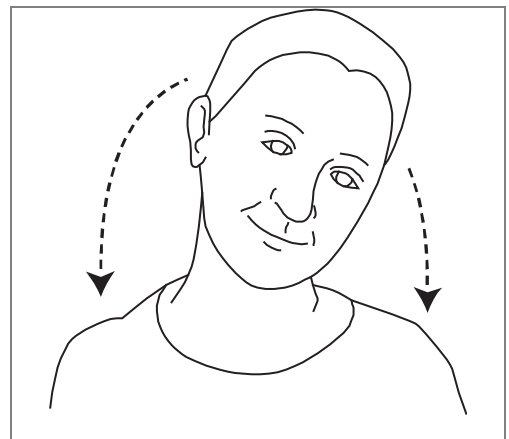
- Bend your neck forward. Chin to chest.
- Bring your head back to neutral position.
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 3 times a day.



- Turn head to one side then to the other side.
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 3 times a day.



- Look straight ahead.
- Bend your ear toward your shoulder.
- Do up to 10 times.
- Do the exercise 3 times a day.

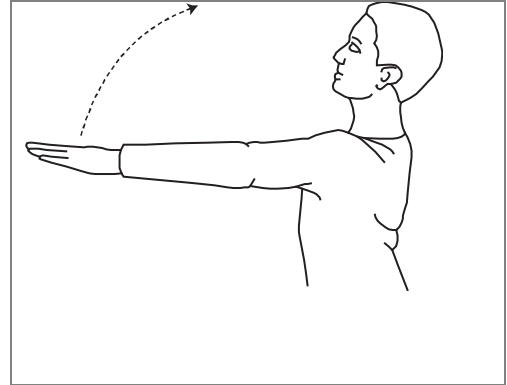


## 7 days after surgery – when you no longer have the drains

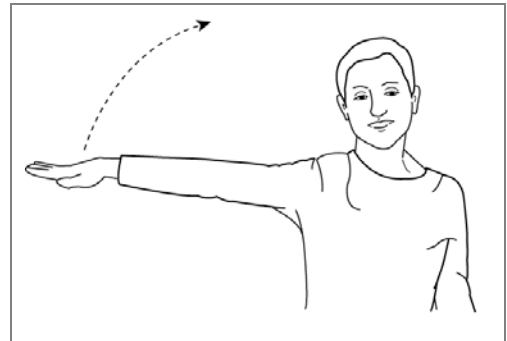
At this time, try to get back to your regular activities unless your surgeon has told you not to. You should feel the stretch.

Continue with:

- Lift arm straight up in front of you, moving up toward your head.

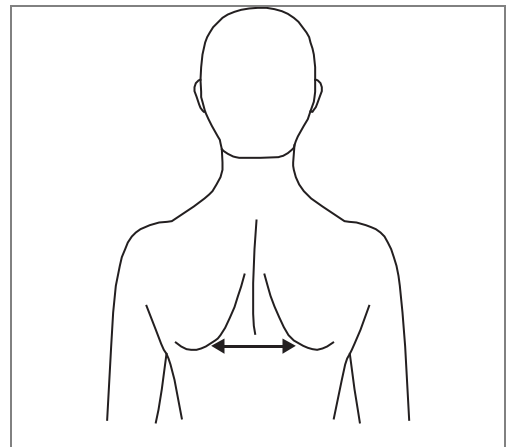


- Lift arm straight out to the side, moving up toward your head.



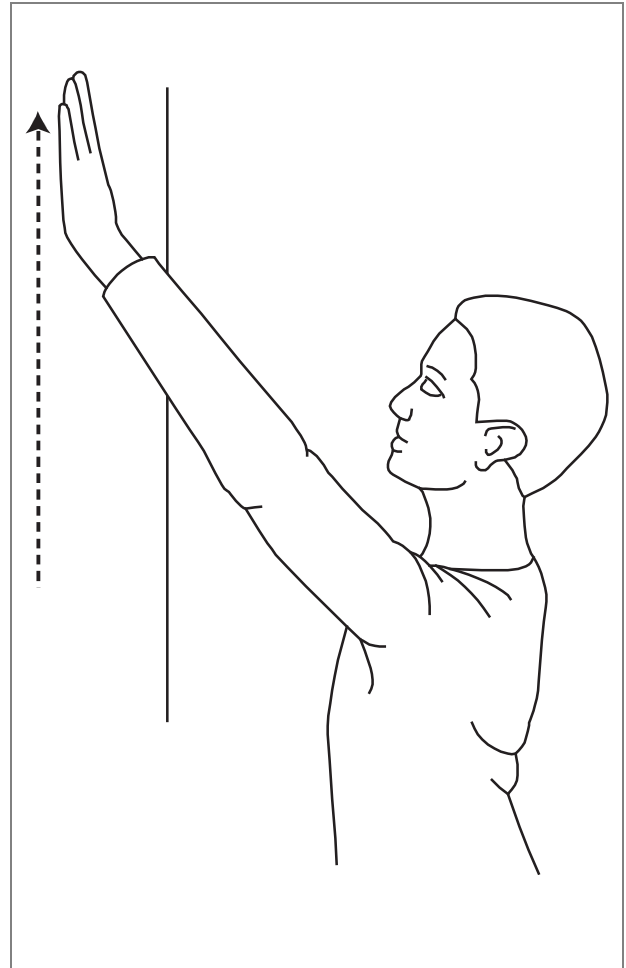
### Shoulder blade squeezes

- Pull your shoulders back and down with your arms at your side.
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Do this 15 to 20 times – 3 times a day.



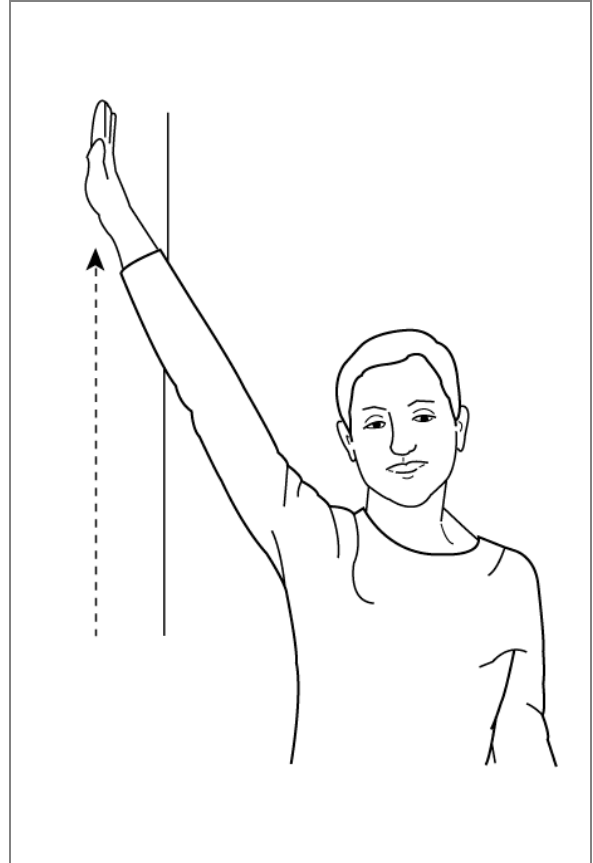
### Wall climbing – standing in front of a wall

- Place your fingers on the wall about waist level.
- Slowly start to walk up the wall as far as you can.
- You can place your hand on a towel so that it slides up the wall easily.
- Climb the wall 5 times, and then hold for 15 to 30 seconds.
- Do this 3 times a day.
- Do this exercise until you can stand in front of the wall, with your arm up by your head.



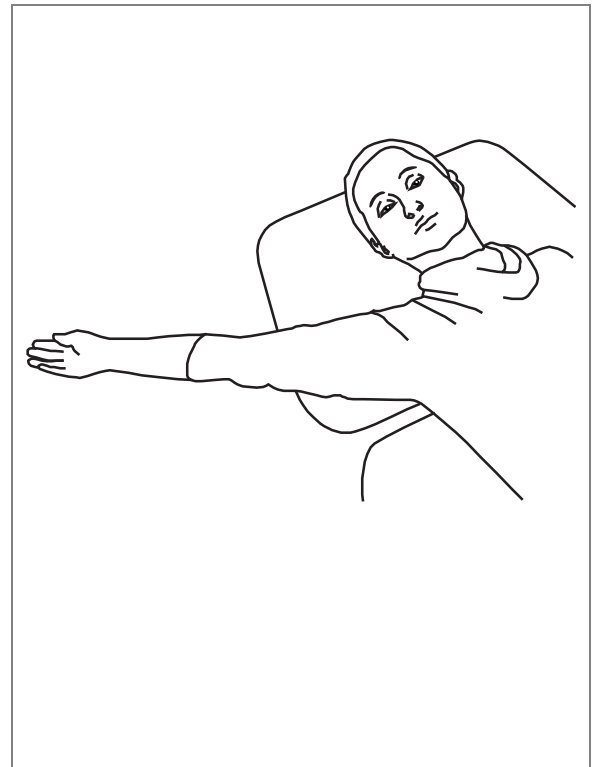
## Wall climbing – standing beside the wall

- Stand beside the wall just less than your arm length's away.
- Place your fingers on the wall about waist level.
- Slowly start to walk up the wall as far as you can.
- You can place your hand on a towel so that it slides up the wall easily.
- Climb the wall 5 times, and then hold for 15 to 30 seconds.
- Do this 3 times a day.
- Do this exercise until you can stand right beside the wall.



## Chest stretch

- Lie at the edge or as close to the edge of your bed as you can.
- Raise your arm up straight in line with your shoulder.
- Carefully let it fall out to the side until you feel a stretch in the area between your breast and your shoulder.
- It should not be painful. You should feel a gentle pull through this area.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Do up to 3 to 5 times.
- Do the exercise 2 times a day.





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