Exercise After Breast Surgery
Dear Patient,

Breast cancer is a journey and you have made it this far successfully. This booklet will help you continue your journey to recovery. Your next stop is physical therapy.

You may notice that your surgery has caused some loss of mobility and weakness when you use your arm on the operated side. This booklet contains information about precautions and exercises selected by physical therapists as most suitable for regaining your original shoulder mobility and avoiding injury to the affected arm.

Stiffness may continue for four to six weeks after surgery, and exercise is effective when practiced daily during this period. If you follow the exercise program recommended by your physician, you should heal faster and your recovery should be more comfortable.

Your physician recommends that you DO NOT begin this exercise program until you are seen for your office follow-up appointment and your drains are removed.
Instructions

You should complete 5-10 repetitions of each exercise two to three times a day. Each exercise should be done slowly, rhythmically, and through your tolerable range of motion to achieve your maximum potential. The exercise program should be continued for at least six weeks following surgery and longer if your physician should recommend it.

When completing the exercises, it is not unusual to experience some pain. This discomfort may also be present before, during, and after exercise. This is primarily due to increasing the range of motion, strength, and flexibility of the affected extremity. If an undue amount of pain persists, or increased swelling and redness is noted at the incision area, contact your physician immediately.

Do these exercises only to fatigue and then stop. This will help prevent lymphedema – swelling – of the affected arm.

What is Lymphedema?

Lymphedema is a condition that causes swelling of a body part. In the case after breast surgery, the swelling usually occurs in the arm on the operated side. The swelling occurs when a protein-rich fluid accumulates outside the lymph system.

Secondary lymphedema occurs after an injury, scarring, or surgical removal of lymph nodes. Lymphedema is most often associated with cancer, surgery, or radiation. Injury to lymph nodes does not always mean that lymphedema will occur, but patients should be aware of symptoms of lymphedema.

Symptoms of lymphedema can include tightness and swelling, some cosmetic deformity, episodes of infection, and open wounds of the affected extremity. The swelling and tightness will gradually worsen over time without treatment.
Exercises to Increase Shoulder Mobility

Exercise #1

1. Lie on your back (without pillows) or sit on a chair.
   
   NOTE: While lying on your back, try to lie flat and do not use pillows.

2. Position involved arm at your side with your palm down.

3. Lift arm toward your head as far as tolerable with a straight elbow.

4. Hold this position for a count of three and slowly return to the starting position.
Exercise #2

1. Lie on your back or sit down on a chair.
   NOTE: While lying on your back, try to lie flat and do not use pillows.

2. Position involved arm at your side, palm facing upward.

3. Raise your arm out to the side toward your ear, and keep your elbow straight.

4. Move as far as tolerable and hold for a count of three.

5. Slowly return to the starting position.
Exercise #3

1. Lie on your back (without pillows).

2. Position your involved arm away from your side at the shoulder level, bending your elbow 90 degrees.

3. Move your arm downward, bringing the palm of your hand toward the surface and hold for a count of three.

4. Move your arm in the opposite direction, bringing the back of your hand toward the surface and hold for a count of three.

5. Return to the starting position.
Exercise #4

1. Lie on your back or sit on a chair.
2. Clasp hands together.
3. Raise your arms overhead as far as possible while keeping your elbows straight.

NOTE: This exercise can also be done using a wand, cane or yardstick. Grasp the wand with both hands and raise your arms together.
Exercise #5

1. Lie on your back or sit on a chair.

2. Place your elbow straight and move your arm out to the side at shoulder level.

3. Bend your elbow and bring your arm across your chest toward your other shoulder and hold this position for a count of three.

4. Return to the starting position and relax for a count of three.

NOTE: This exercise can also be done using a wand, cane or yardstick. Hold the cane with both hands at shoulder level and keep your elbows straight.
Exercise #6

1. Lie on your back or sit on a chair.

2. Clasp hands in front of you and keep elbows straight.

3. Slowly raise arms straight overhead and bring hand to the top of your head bending your elbows.

4. Slide clasped hands down your neck and spread elbows out sideways.

5. Hold position for a count of three and then pull elbows toward each other and hold for a count of three.

6. Return to the starting position and relax.
Exercise #7

You will need a wand, cane or yardstick for this exercise.

1. Lie on your back or stand upright.
2. Hold the wand with both hands. Face the palm of your affected arm away from you.
3. Slowly move your arms to one side and upwards, toward your ear, keeping your elbows straight.
4. Move your arm as far as tolerable and hold for a count of three.
5. Slowly return to the starting position and relax.
Exercise #8

1. Place the back of your hand at your lower back.

2. Slowly slide your hand up the middle of your back for a count of three.

3. Return to the starting position.
Exercise #9

1. Face a wall or a corner and stand about one foot away from the wall.

2. Place palm of hand on wall and slide arm toward ceiling.

3. Hold the position for a count of three.

4. Return to the starting position.

NOTE: Step toward the wall as needed to allow the hand to slide upward. If using a corner of the wall, step your body beyond the level of your arm, if possible. Do not stand on your toes or bend backward or forward at your waist.
Exercise #10

1. Stand about one foot away from a wall or a corner.

2. Turn sideways so the affected arm is towards the wall.

3. Place the side of your hand on the wall and slide arm toward the ceiling.

4. Hold the position for a count of three.

5. Return to the starting position.

NOTE: Face forward; do not turn your body toward the wall. Step toward the wall as needed to allow your hand to slide upward. Keep your arm in line with your body and do not let it slide forward.
Precautions Following Breast Surgery

The following is a list of Do's and Don'ts following surgery. You should take special care of your arm and hand on the surgical side, as any injury and/or infection could increase your risk for an infection in the already vulnerable surgical area. Also, as with any surgery, there is the potential for swelling (edema) to occur in the surgical arm.

Do's

1. Wear protective clothing (i.e. gloves) when gardening and washing dishes.
2. Elevate arm if it feels heavy or if swelling occurs.
3. Contact your doctor if there is an increase in swelling, warmth, pain, or redness in affected arm.
4. Apply lanolin hand cream daily if skin becomes dry. Keep cuticles moist.
5. Use sunscreen and insect repellant as needed when outside.
6. If a minor break in the skin occurs, wash with soap and water and cover with a band-aid.
7. Lifting of objects can be completed to patient tolerance.
8. Prop yourself up in bed while sleeping. Sleep with pillows under your affected arm. For pillows made specifically for breast cancer patients, contact The Pink Pillow Project at thepinkpillowproject.com.

Don'ts

1. Do not allow blood pressure or injections into operated side (unless physician specifies).
2. Do not hold a cigarette or a hot object in the affected hand. Avoid heat from the stove and oven.
3. Avoid skin punctures such as burns, cuts, sunburns, mosquito bites, and cuticle splits.
4. Avoid shaving underarm area or using deodorants (may use electric shaver) immediately after surgery.
Notes/Questions for your Physician:
For more information, contact:

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Our Mission
We are called to reveal the healing love of Jesus to those in need.

Our 2020 Vision
Inspired by faith and committed to excellence, we will lead the transformation of healthcare in our communities.