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# Exercises

## After

### Breast Cancer Surgery



For all Breast Cancer Patients and Survivors, we offer many free services here in the Cayman Islands

## **Why do I need to do exercises after my breast surgery?**

These exercises can help you regain arm and shoulder movement after surgery for breast cancer.

Muscles seize up very quickly if they are not used, so it is important to do these exercises as part of your daily routine.

The exercises can also help:

- 🎗 improve symptoms that may be caused by tight scars and
- 🎗 cording, when you feel as if you have a tight cord running down
- 🎗 your affected arm
- 🎗 prevent long-term problems with arm and shoulder movement,
- 🎗 posture and stiffness
- 🎗 reduce the risk of lymphoedema – swelling of the arm, hand, breast or
- 🎗 chest area caused by a build-up of lymph fluid

If you are worried about any of these, or have symptoms of cording, speak to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist as soon as possible. The exercises have been developed with the help of breast surgeons, breast care nurses and physiotherapists.

If you need help with the cost of seeing a specialist or are not sure where to go, please contact the Breast Cancer Foundation for their help. (contact details are at the end of this leaflet).

## **Who are the exercises suitable for?**

The exercises are suitable for people who have had:

- 🎗 breast surgery
- 🎗 lymph node removal
- 🎗 radiotherapy

## **When to start the exercises**

Ideally, if you can, start the exercises the day after your surgery, If you feel you are unable to start the exercises within a couple of days of your surgery, speak to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist. Do not worry if you cannot manage to do all the exercises every time. For example, during radiotherapy you may find the exercises more difficult. Do as much as you feel you can. The suggestions in this leaflet are meant as a guideline only, complete the exercises at your own pace.

## **How should the exercises feel?**

- ⚠ You should not feel pain when doing the exercises. However, a stretching or pulling sensation is normal.
- ⚠ You may be advised to take some pain relief before doing the exercises.
- ⚠ The more you do the exercises, the easier they should become.
- ⚠ Always do the warm-up at the start and the cool-down at the end of each session to help avoid injury and prevent stiffness.
- ⚠ If at any time you become concerned about your range of movement or level of discomfort, speak to your physiotherapist.

## **Reasons to stop exercising.**

Stop doing the exercises and speak to your surgeon or specialist physiotherapist as soon as possible if you have:

- ⚠ a seroma (a collection of fluid under the arm or in the breast or chest wall)
- ⚠ wound infection or healing problems
- ⚠ a prolonged pain or pain that gets worse during these exercises, or continues once you have finished them

Only re-start the exercises again when your doctor or specialist physiotherapist says it is safe to do so.

## How long should I continue doing the exercises?

If you have just had surgery, keep doing the exercises until you have got back the range of movement you had before your operation. Continue doing the exercises if you are going to have radiotherapy as they will help your shoulder flexibility.

If you have had radiotherapy, it is a good idea to do the exercises for as long as you are still feeling tightness and stiffness. Arm stiffness and weakness can occur long after surgery and radiotherapy so you may want to continue doing the exercises after this. Talk to your physiotherapist if you are not sure how long to keep up the exercise programme or if you have any concerns about your recovery after surgery.

## When to do the exercises

**First week of surgery:** Do the warm-up basic exercises and cool-down.

**Second week & beyond:** Do the warm-up basic and more advanced exercises and the cool-down.

All these exercises are meant to be a guide, and you should complete the exercises at your own pace and under the instruction of your medical professional.

You can start the exercises the day after your surgery.

Do each exercise 5 times before you move to the next one try to do them 3 times a day – in the morning, around midday and in the evening.

If you have had breast re-construction, talk to your surgeon and specialised physiotherapist before you start any exercise and follow their advice.

You should not feel pain when doing the exercises, however a stretching or pulling sensation is normal. If you have any concerns about your range of movement or level of discomfort while doing these exercises, speak to your surgeon or specialised physiotherapist.

**If your insurance does not cover you for the services of a specialised physiotherapist, the Breast Cancer Foundation can arrange assistance for you at no charge. Please contact us.**

# Warm-up and cool-down

Read the information on the other side of the leaflet before you start, especially the section called 'When to stop'.

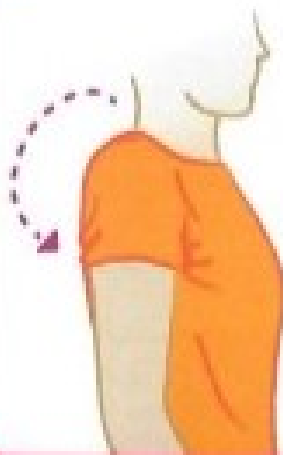
## 1 Shoulder shrugs

- Keep your arms loose and relaxed by your sides.
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and lower gently back down.



## 2 Shoulder circling

- Keep your arms loose and relaxed by your sides.
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, then circle them back and down.



## Basic exercises

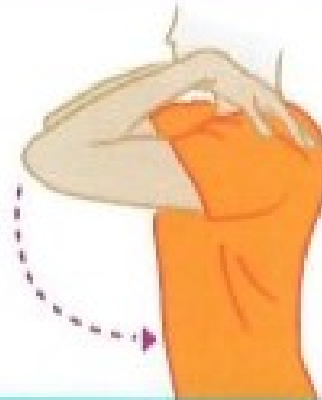
You can do these exercises sitting down or standing up.

During the first week after surgery, do not raise your arms above shoulder level (90 degrees) when doing these exercises.

3

### Bent arm forwards

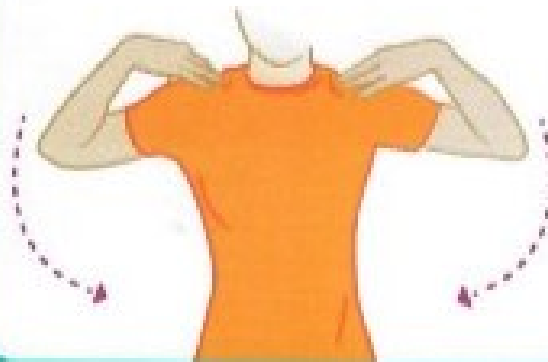
- Bend your elbows and rest your hands lightly on your shoulders.
- Raise both your arms forward so they are at right angles to your body.
- Lower your elbows slowly.



4

### Bent arm sideways

- Rest your hands on your shoulders, but this time raise your elbows out to the sides.
- Lower your elbows slowly.



**5**

### Back scratching

- Hold your arms out to the sides and bend your arms from the elbow.
- Slowly reach up behind your back to just under your shoulder blades.
- Slowly lower your arms back down to your sides

**6**

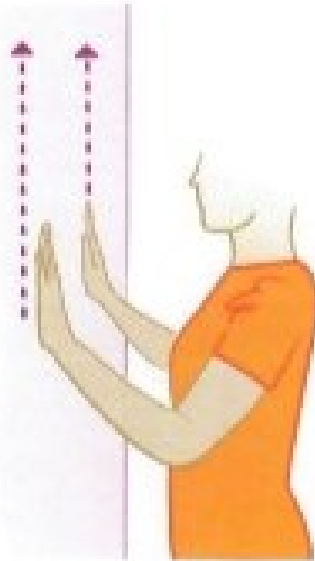
### Winging it

- Place your hands behind your head with your elbows pointing forwards.
- Bring your elbows back so they're pointing out to the sides, then return to the starting position.



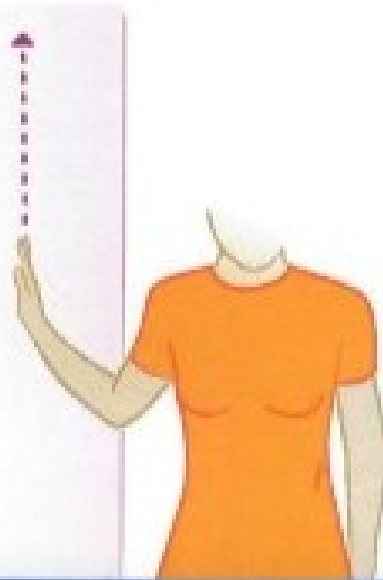
## More advanced exercises

### 7 Wall climbing



#### Step one

- With your feet apart, stand close to and facing a wall. Put both hands on the wall at shoulder level.
- Looking straight ahead, gradually work your hands up the wall – sliding them or using your fingers to climb. Get as far as you can, to feel a stretch but not pain.
- Hold here and count to 10.
- Slide your hands back to shoulder level before repeating the exercise.
- Try to get higher each time.



#### Step 2

- Stand sideways with your affected side nearest the wall.
- Put your hand on the wall, keeping your elbow bent and your shoulders relaxed.
- Look straight ahead and gradually creep your hand up the wall as far as you can, allowing your elbow to straighten.
- Hold here and count to 10, then lower your hand back down.



**8****Arm lifts****Alternative**

If you have difficulty lying down – for example because of breathlessness – you can do this exercise in a sitting position, leaning back in your chair.

- Lie on the bed or floor with a cushion or pillow to support your head.
- Take three or four really deep breaths and concentrate on relaxing your shoulders so they are not hunched up towards your ears.
- Clasp your hands together or hold onto a stick or broom handle. Keep your elbows straight and lift your arms up and over your head as far as you feel comfortable.
- Hold them here and count to 10, then lower your arms slowly. You may find it useful to put a pillow behind you to support your arms until you're able to get them further back.

**9****Elbow push**

- Lie on your back with your hands behind your head and your elbows out to the sides.
- Gently push your elbows downwards into the bed or floor as far as is comfortable.
- Hold and count to 10, then relax.



Find us on




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**BCF would like to thank the following in helping to create this leaflet:**

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We would also like to acknowledge Breast Cancer Care (UK)



## About the Foundation

The Foundation was started in 2008, this was the 10th Anniversary of the passing of Brenda Tibbetts-Lund, who had a very courageous battle with breast cancer, even before her diagnosis, Brenda had been very active in the Cayman community promoting breast health. Having sponsored the Brenda Tibbitts Lund walk/run in her honour, Kim Lund wanted to do something special in 2008. That is when the Breast Cancer Gala Dinner idea was born, all funds raised from the Gala Dinner were to benefit breast cancer patients here in Cayman. After that gala, the realization that there was an enormous demand for funds for breast cancer patients culminated in Kim Lund and James Bovell (Owners/Brokers at RE/MAX) along with John Broadbent Cayman Islands took the decision to found a not-for-profit charity (NPO 124) and make the Gala Dinner and Annual Event, since its inception it has become one of the most anticipated and prestigious black (pink actually) tie events on the island.

The Foundation was created to provide financial support for the CI Cancer Society and this is still the case ten years later. In 2015 the Foundation launched its own Wellness Program which provides a multitude of holistic and medical services to anyone going through breast cancer. The organization works diligently in raising Awareness and providing local practitioners with the training, skill, and medical equipment to be able to help breast cancer patients in the best way possible.

