Arm & shoulder exercises
after surgery
A guide for people who have had breast cancer surgery

Getting started

Reach forward as far as you feel comfortable. You may feel strain in your shoulder if you reach too far forward, so adjust your reach accordingly. Stop if you feel any pain or discomfort.

Level one exercises

These gentle exercises increase range of movement. You should perform them several times a day. Repeat them as often as you like. Your doctor, physiotherapist, or exercise physiologist can help you develop an exercise program that suits your needs.

Level two exercises

These exercises help make your arm stronger and ease the tightness in your chest and shoulder muscles. You can perform them lying down, sitting, or standing.

Getting started

Be sure to 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 booklet, Breast cancer surgery: information for women having breast cancer surgery, please call Cancer Council 13 11 20 or visit your local Cancer Council website.

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.

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

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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.

This is a confidential service.

Call Cancer Council 13 11 20, or visit your local Cancer Council website.

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Level one exercises

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

**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.

**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.

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

**Hand 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.

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

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

Level two exercises

**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.

**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.

**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.