



# **BREAST SURGERY MANAGEMENT**

**LANGLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**  
**Physiotherapy Department**

## **BEFORE YOU COME INTO HOSPITAL:**

You are to be admitted on: \_\_\_\_\_ at: \_\_\_\_\_

- Arrange for a ride home before coming to hospital.
- Leave all your valuables at home - no jewelry, money, credit cards etc.
- Nothing to eat after midnight (no solids).
- Clear fluids (tea, coffee, water, or apple juice) until 4 hours before hospital admission. No milk products.
- Shower or bath before coming to hospital. Use the antiseptic sponge for approximately 3 minutes and shave underarms if required. **DO NOT** apply deodorant.
- Take your medication as instructed.
- Practice breathing/arm exercises twice per day in order to familiarize yourself with them and develop good habits for the post-operative period.

## **UPON ARRIVAL:**

Use the North elevator to proceed directly to the Surgical Admission Department on the second floor

## **AFTER YOUR SURGERY:**

In order to ensure a full and speedy recovery after your surgery the following should be addressed on a daily basis:

## **PREVENTION OF LUNG/CIRCULATION PROBLEMS:**

It is important to do regular deep breathing and coughing in order to prevent the build up of secretions in the lungs and to carry out leg exercises to prevent blood clots. Continue this hourly until you are up and walking around normally.

## **COMFORT:**

Your doctor will prescribe medication for pain, please ask the nurse for this as you need it, movement and exercises will be easier if your pain is under control. Expect a mild burning sensation from the incision, and a mild pulling sensation from the drain site. You may experience a stiffness/soreness especially in your arm and upper body. You may also experience numbness around your incision.

## **DIET:**

Begin with clear fluids (water, apple juice, Jell-O) and gradually increase as tolerated. If nauseated, take anti-nausea medications as directed and continue with clear fluid until the nausea subsides. Drink 6 - 8 glasses of water per day to help prevent constipation.

## **DRESSINGS:**

You may shower 48 hours after surgery or once the drain is removed which ever comes first. Never leave a wet dressing on. If it becomes wet, remove outer gaze dressing but leave steri-strips (paper tapes) on until they fall off on their own. Allow to air dry. Apply clean dressing if there is drainage coming from the incision. Do not use deodorant until your incision is completely healed. Your physician may wish to delay the use of antiperspirants. Check with your doctor.

## **ACTIVITY:**

Begin to use your affected arm as soon as possible i.e. for personal hygiene, getting dressed and eating, etc. Walking is fine, rest when you are tired. Avoid excessive arm swing initially on the operated side and support the arm as needed with your hand in your pocket or thumb tucked into your waistband. Start arm exercises according to your physiotherapist's instructions (see "Exercise" section).

### ***Call you Doctor or go to the hospital if:***

- Your pain is worse or not help by pain medication.
- Vomiting unrelieved by anti-nausea medication and lasts longer than 8 hours after discharge from hospital.
- Fever over 38° C (100° F) or chills.
- You notice redness, hardness, significant swelling or foul smelling or excessive drainage from the incision.

## **PREVENTION OF INFECTION:**

Lymph fluid is a clear liquid that bathes all the tissues of the arm to keep them clean and free of infection. If lymph nodes are removed from the armpit, drainage of lymph fluid from the arm is reduced, the arm may swell and the risk for infection is increased. For this reason try to avoid cuts, scratches, burns (including sunburns) and insect bites to the infected arm. Wear gloves and long sleeves when gardening and oven mitts when reaching into a hot oven. Also keep the arm clean and make sure it is thoroughly dry after washing. Use lotion to prevent dry skin. Do not have blood drawn, intravenous lines started, injections given or blood pressure taken on the affected arm from now on. Use the other arm. Signs of infection are redness, pain and localized increase in temperature and swelling. Treat any sign of infection immediately by washing the area, by applying antiseptic ointment and then a Band-Aid. If the condition worsens at all contact the doctor, a course of antibiotics may be needed.

## **PREVENTION OF ARM SWELLING (LYMPHEDEMA):**

Normally, lymph fluid drains from the arm, through the lymph nodes in the armpit and back into the circulation. This normal flow is slowed down or blocked if some of the lymph nodes are removed by surgery, or if scar tissue has formed from radiotherapy, infection or the cancer

itself. The lymph fluid may then accumulate, causing arm swelling. This swelling may limit mobility of the arm causing stiffness in the arm and shoulder. The signs of lymphedema may include puffy hand, a feeling of heaviness in your arm or impressions left from your sleeves, wristwatch or rings. This may occur within the first few months to years after surgery and treatment. Prevention and management of lymphedema includes exercises (see “Exercise” section), compression garment and compression pump therapy. A compression garment is an elasticized sleeve and/or glove that helps to control the size of the arm. It should be worn for long periods during waking hours and during exercise but removed at night. Compression pump therapy is a special multi-chambered sleeve that is applied to the affected arm for a length of time and frequency determined by the doctor/physiotherapist. The sleeve is attached to a pump which inflates/deflates the chambers in turn to a set pressure, thus gently massaging the arm to stimulate lymph drainage. The compression garment should always be re-applied following a pump therapy session.

## **SHOULDER/ARM EXERCISES:**

### **Goals:**

- To regain full arm and shoulder movement after surgery.
- To prevent "tethering" (attachment of the tissue under the skin to other tissues beneath) which feels like having tight cords under the arm and sometimes extending down into the arm.
- To regain muscle strength and ease muscle spasms (caused by weak, tight muscles).
- To help prevent swelling.
- To prevent posture abnormalities.

### **Things to remember:**

- Use your affected arm functionally as much as possible within a pain free range of motion.
- Watch yourself in a mirror as you exercise, use both arms at once so you can compare the two. Your goal is to have the arm on the affected side move as full and freely as the arm on the unaffected side.
- Do the exercises three times each, three times a day. As you improve, gradually increase the number of repetitions to a maximum of 10 of each.
- Do not hold your breath when exercising; breathe normally in a relaxed manner.
- Always press just far enough to feel a gentle stretch, but not so far that it is painful.
- Hold the stretch for up to 5 seconds then repeat the movement.
- You might experience mild muscle soreness after exercising. This is normal, but if pain or fatigue result, reduce the number of times the exercise is done.
- Care must be taken not to overwork the arm and shoulder if the armpit lymph nodes were removed, since straining/over-stretching can cause pain and arm swelling.
- You may find that you need to continue these exercises for several weeks until you gain full range of shoulder joint motion and muscle strength, so do not be discouraged if your progress seems to be slow.

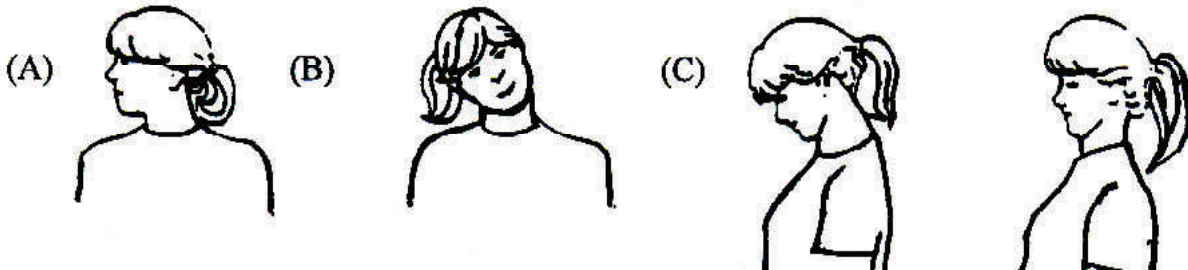
**WHILE THE DRAIN IS STILL IN (Day 1 to 4):**

- Goal**
- \* To prevent and/or reduce arm swelling.
  - \* To start gentle movements of the neck and shoulders.

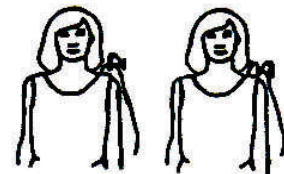
**Positioning:** Several times during the day elevate the affected arm on pillows so that your hand is above your shoulder. While in this position, make a fist with your hand then stretch your fingers out straight, do hand pumping. Repeat several times.

**Exercises:** Sit in a comfortable chair with a backrest that reaches up to the middle of your shoulder blades. Your feet should be resting comfortably on the floor, if not, use a low footstool to protect your lower back.

- (A) Turn your head from side to side.
- (B) Bend your head to the side bringing your ear to your shoulder. Repeat with the other side.
- (C) Bend your head forward and up to level. Do not bend head backward.



- Slowly rotate your shoulders clockwise then counter clockwise.



- While sitting or lying with your arm at your side, bend your elbow while making a fist.
- Then straighten your elbow and relax your hand.



**REMEMBER:** to start using your affected arm for personal hygiene, dressing and eating etc.

**AFTER THE DRAINS ARE REMOVED (Day 5 to 9):**

- Goal:**
- \* Continue to prevent and/or reduce arm swelling.
  - \* To start gentle movements of the affected arm and shoulder.

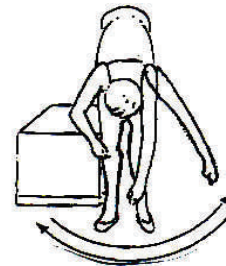
**Positioning:** Continue to elevate your arm and carry out the hand pumping exercise several times a day.

**Exercises:** While standing, bend forward at the hips and allow the affected arm to hang loosely in front of the body. Place the unaffected hand on a table or chair for support.

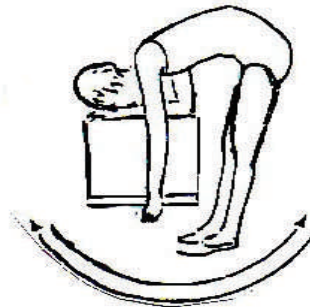
- Swing the arm in a clockwise circle, beginning with small circles and gradually increasing the size. Make 10 circles. Then make 10 circles in a counterclockwise direction.



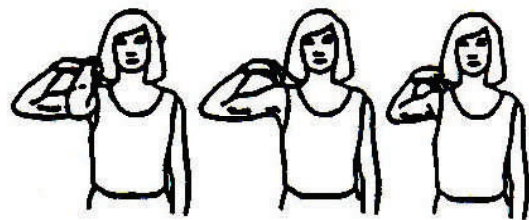
- Swing arm side to side across the chest 10 times in each direction. You should feel a gentle stretch.



- Swing arm forward and backward as far as possible without any pulling at your incision.



- Place your right fingertips on your shoulder and raise your elbow to shoulder level then move the elbow forwards and backwards. Repeat with the other arm.



**AFTER THE SUTURES ARE REMOVED (Day 10 - 6 weeks):**

**Goal:** \* To stretch and regain full active range of motion of the affected arm and shoulder.

**Exercises:**

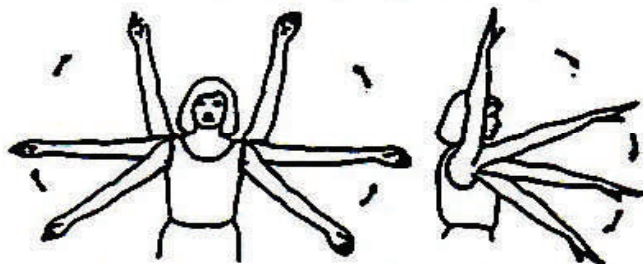
Raise your arms:

- \* out forward
- \* straight upward
- \* out sideways and down

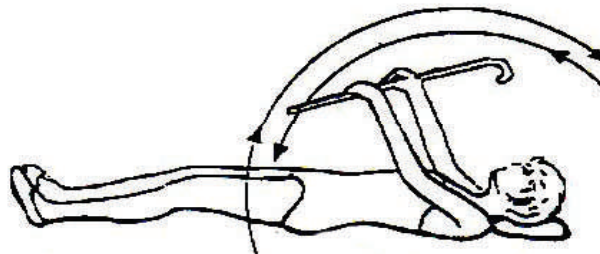


Raise your arms:

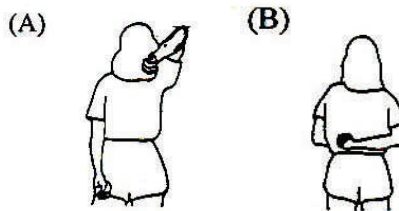
- \* out sideways
- \* then straight up
- \* then forward and down



- Lie flat on your back.
- Hold onto a cane or broom with both hands approximately 14" apart.
- Raise the cane forward and upward as far as you can go comfortably or until your elbow is near your ear. Then gradually return to original position.



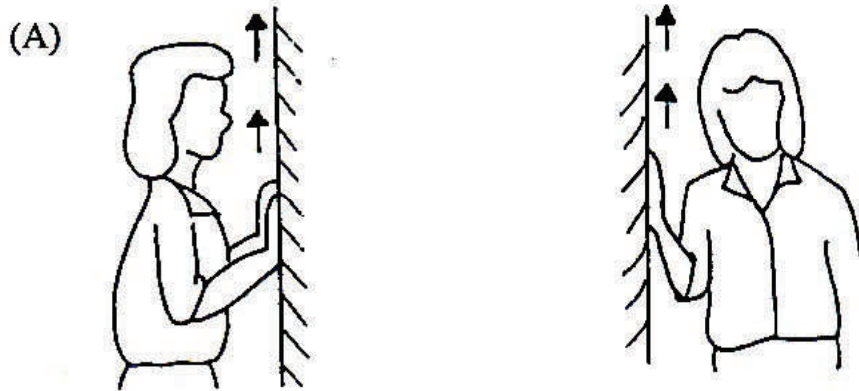
- (A) Reach behind your neck and down your back as far as you can.
- (B) Reach behind your back and up as far as you can (as if to do up your bra).



- Reach your arms back behind you as far as is comfortable
- Do not over-stretch.

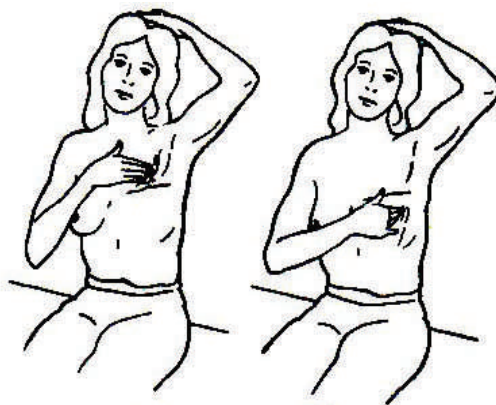


- (A) Stand facing a wall. Bend your elbows and place the palms of your hands on the wall at shoulder height. Slide hands up the wall. Move closer to the wall as you are able to reach higher until you obtain a full stretch in your shoulders. Slide hands back down to start position. Rest and repeat.
- (B) Stand sideways to the wall with the affected side closest to the wall. Slide your hand up the wall. Move closer to the wall as you are able to reach higher until you obtain a full stretch in your shoulder. Slide hand back down to the start position. Rest and repeat.



#### SCAR MASSAGE

- Place the hand of the operated side on top of your head.
- Place the flat surface of three fingers of the other hand on your chest just above the incision line as in the picture. Press the skin against the ribs and move it in slow circular movements clockwise five times then counter-clockwise five times. Keep repeating this as you move one inch at a time along the top and bottom of the incision
- Be sure to cover the whole area. Do this once a day after a warm shower.
- Do not put lotion on the skin until the massage is complete as your fingers will slip





## **AFTER SIX WEEKS:**

- Goal:**
- \* To regain full strength of your affected arm/shoulder.
  - \* To increase sense of well being.

### **Exercises:**

- Resistive, i.e. gradually start to use weights/ resist the movements. You may start an aerobic exercise program or overall fitness program.
- Isometric Exercises: Use opposite hand to apply light to moderate resistance.



Outward at Elbow



Forward



Outward at Wrist

## **FOR SIX WEEKS AFTER THE SURGERY:**

- Avoid any heavy pushing or pulling activities e.g. vacuuming, window washing, scrubbing, moving a golf cart, etc.
- Avoid reaching overhead with heavy objects in your hands. Use a stool and work at or below shoulder level with the affected arm, or use the other arm.
- Avoid carrying heavy objects in the hand of the affected arm e.g. large suitcases, use one with wheels instead. Shoulder bags and heavy handbags should be carried on the opposite shoulder.
- Ironing may be done but limit the time to 10-minute sessions with other activities in between.

## **FOR SIX MONTHS AFTER THE SURGERY:**

- Avoid push-ups as supporting your weight on your arms is hard on the shoulder and chest muscles and may cause pain and swelling of the affected arm.
- If you are to have Radiation Therapy, you should continue the exercises for 6 months after the course ends, as radiation may tighten the exposed structures.
- If during the year following surgery you wish to return to some strong physical work or hobby, please consult with your doctor first.

### **WE WISH YOU A SPEEDY RECOVERY!**

Further reading: *Recovering From Breast Surgery*, Diana Stumm, P.T., Hunter House