

BREAST SURGERY RECOVERY



Plastic Surgery & Dermatology Associates (PSDA)

GUIDEBOOK

EXERCISE PROGRAM

The following are exercises to increase your arm mobility, circulation and strength. The exercises are to be done only with the approval of your physician.

EXERCISES TO BEGIN WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL:

The breathing exercise relaxes both you and your muscles.

How to do: Place the hand that is most comfortable to use over the corner of your chest. Take a slow deep breath through your nose and let your chest expand fully. Exhale completely, letting your chest and shoulders sag and relax.

When to do: Up to five times or more every hour, or until you begin to feel pain.

ARM LIFTS

Arm lifts will enable you to regain a normal range of shoulder motion and reduce pain and discomfort.

How to do: Extend arms outward in front and clasp hands together with elbows pulled in toward the body. Slowly begin to raise arms upward. Raise arms until you feel discomfort, then lower arms.

When to do: 10 times every hour, 10 times a day.

SQUEEZING A BALL

Squeezing a ball increases the circulation in your arm and helps restore strength to your forearm.

How to do: Squeeze a ball using the hand on the side of surgery. Place finger in string and throw the ball out using the arm and shoulder. Catch the ball if desired.

When to do: At any time while in bed or walking.

EXERCISES TO BE DONE WHEN INSTRUCTED BY YOUR PHYSICIAN:

WALK THE WALL

The purpose of “walk the wall” is to assist you in reaching your normal range of motion.

How to do: Before beginning, reach as high as you can with your unaffected arm, or are on the opposite side as your surgery, and mark the height - this height is your goal. (If you have had bilateral surgery, or if you have previous limited movement of your shoulder, your goal is to achieve pre-surgery range of motion.)

Step 1:

Face the wall standing about one foot away or a distance that is comfortable. Bend our elbows and place your palms against the wall at shoulder level.

Step 2:

Work both hands up the wall parallel to each other until incisional pulling or pain occurs. Stop and work both hands back down to the starting position.

Step 3:

Rest and repeat, adjusting your position to the wall as needed.

After the fifth time, mark the highest level reached. Your goal is to reach higher with each set of exercises until normal range of motion occurs.

Equivalent Activity:

Washing windows, mirrors or reaching for items on a high shelf.

When to do: Five times, several times a day.

LIMP ARM SWING

Designed to relax and loosen the shoulder, the limp arm swing works in three different ways.

How to do: Place your unaffected arm on the back of a chair. Rest your forehead on that arm if more comfortable. Allow your affected arm, or arm on the same side as your surgery, to hang loosely until your elbow is straight and your whole arm and hand are limp.

Option 1:

Swing your arm limply from left to right, making sure the Motion comes from the shoulder and not the elbow.
Swing the arm until relaxed.

Option 2:

Swing your arm in small circles. As your arm relaxes, increase the size of the circles staying within the range of comfort. Repeat several times and reverse direction.

Option 3:

Swing your arm forward and backward from the shoulder.

Equivalent Activity: Sweeping, vacuuming (with physician approval) or walking.

When to do: At least three times a day.

CLASP, REACH AND SPREAD

This exercise increases your shoulder/arm motion both upward and outward.

How to do: Sit up straight and clasp hands together. Slowly raise your hands toward your forehead. When the incision area starts to pull slightly, stop and hold that position. Breathe deeply until comfortable, then proceed. Continue raising your hands until you are able to reach the top of your head. If pain free, slip your clasped hands down behind your neck keep and keep your head erect. Gradually spread your elbows apart, remembering to stop and breathe deeply when pulling or pain occurs.

Equivalent Activity:

Fastening a necklace, brushing or rolling your hair.

When to do: five times a day as tolerated.

PULLEY

The pulley exercise is for upward and outward shoulder motion.

How to do: Place a six-foot rope over a secure hook or shower rod. Put the back of a chair under the rope or stand under the rope. Sit or stand up straight and grasp the rope as high as you can with your unaffected hand. With your affected arm, begin to reach or creep up the rope until you start to feel pain. Stop and loop the rope around your hand. Let both arms hang limply and take slow, deep breaths. If deep breathing relieves the pain, pull your affected arm upward slowly by pulling down on the rope with your other arm. Stop when it hurts. Again, breathe deeply until the pain stops. Repeat this part of the exercise. When you tire, unloop your hand and with both hands slide slowly down the rope. Eventually, you will be able to get as high with the affected arm as with the unaffected one.

Equivalent Activity: Painting walls or ceilings.

When to do: Unlimited times.

ROPE TWIRLING

This is designed for outward and backward motion of the shoulder.

How to do: Tie a rope to a doorknob or drawer handle. With your affected arm out to the side, begin twirling the rope in small circles gradually increasing the size of the circle. Stop if any pain occurs. Breathe deeply and repeat.

When to do: Unlimited times.

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS FOR EXERCISE

Do not exercise for more than 15 - 30 minutes at one time. Before exercising, take a pain pill, if needed, to relax and ease the pain. If possible, exercise to music or find a friend or a relative to exercise with you.

GOING HOME INSTRUCTIONS

Things you may do:

- Take a shallow tub bath (take care to keep incision dry).
- Shampoo your hair and go to the beauty salon when you wish.
- Ride in the car.
- Begin light housework.
- Take short shopping trips, attend church, go out to dinner or to a movie.
- Do what you feel like doing or what comes naturally. Get plenty of rest and do not worry if you experience some fatigue. Fatigue is quite common when you have had more bed rest than usual.
- Elevate your arm when convenient or when reclining.

Things you may do when approved by your physician:

- Drive the car.
- Continue and increase your arm exercises.
- Heavy housework (mopping, waxing floors, vacuuming, moving furniture).

Things that may occur and need to be reported to your physician:

- Fever greater than 100.4 degrees that persists for more than four hours.
- Redness around the incision or the arm.
- Fluid collection beneath the skin, underneath the arm or around the incision.
- Swelling of the affected arm.
- Limited movement of the affected arm. This is likely to occur early in the recovery period).
- Pus-like drainage from the incision.
- Unexpected opening of the incisional wound.

Precautions:

- Protect yourself from sunburn by wearing long sleeves when outside.
- Be careful to avoid pricks, cuts or burns to your arm or hand.
- Avoid any small puncture wounds - use a thimble when sewing.
- If an injury occurs, cleanse the area with soap and water or hydrogen peroxide. Watch for infection, and if concerned, report to your physician.
- Carry your purse or other heavy objects on the unaffected side.
- Push nail cuticles back with a cloth. Do not cut cuticles or hang nails. A small cut could cause an infection.
- Wear a loose-fitting rubber glove while doing the dishes, filing papers or doing yard work.
- Do not shave beneath the affected arm until approved by your physician.
- If possible, do not allow blood pressure readings to be taken on the affected arm.
- Do not allow blood samples, injections or vaccinations to be taken or given in the affected arm.

WHEN DO I...

Change dressings?

Dressings are sent home with you. You should change them only as directed by your physician.

Wear a bra?

You may wear your bra as instructed by your physician.

Take pain medication?

Your physician may send prescriptions home with you or may prescribe over-the-counter medications, such as Tylenol, Extra-Strength Tylenol caplets or equivalent, for discomfort.

See my doctor again?

Use the space below to record the time of the next office visit.

Call

Dr. _____
_____ for visit.

Appointment

time: _____

Date: _____

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Breast Self-Examination (BSE) is needed to detect any sign of problems as early as possible. Early detection can lead to the best chance of a cure. Your nurse has a pamphlet, "How to Examine Your Breasts," and will review or teach BSE to you or other females in your family. Report to your physician any changes in skin texture, color, size, shape, dimpling, lumps, thickening, rashes, nipple discharge or tenderness (not associated with menstrual period).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR JACKSON PRATT (JP) BULB CARE

Empty the JP bulb:

1. Obtain a cup to catch the fluid.
2. Unpin the drain from Surgi-Bra or bra.
3. Do not strip tubing unless instructed to do so by your nurse or physician.
4. Open the valve (bulb will expand) and gently squeeze fluid from the bulb into the cup to empty it completely.
5. Squeeze the bulb tightly and close the valve (this reactivates the suction).
6. Repin the bulb to your Surgi-Bra or bra.
7. Measure the fluid and record the amount.

Record fluid of JP bulb:

1. Keep daily 24-hour totals of the fluid.
2. Empty the bulb as many times as you need. Just remember to record the amount of fluid.
3. Good times for emptying the bulb are when you wake up in the morning, midday and before you go to bed at night.

Your physician will want to see 24-hour totals.

You should notice a decrease in fluid over several days. Be sure to call your physician's office if:

- The fluid increases significantly.
- The fluid changes color (becomes bloody or cloudy).
- Redness develops or secretions ooze around the drain site.
- A fever greater than 100.4 degrees persists for more than four hours.

Care for the JP drain site:

1. Cleanse the site with one-half strength hydrogen peroxide.
2. Apply Polysporin Ointment using a clean Q-tip or cotton.
3. Do this twice a day, morning and afternoon.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Brochures from the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute

Advanced Cancer
After Breast Cancer
Breast Cancer: How Great is Your Risk?
Caring for Your Breasts
Chemotherapy and You
Fibrocystic Breasts: A Non-Disease
Finding a Lump in Your Breasts
Helping Children Understand
How to Examine Your Breasts
Mammography
Radiation Therapy and You
Radiation Therapy: A Treatment for Early Stage Breast Cancer
Taking Time
We Can Help
What You Need to Know about Breast Cancer

Films from the American Cancer Society

Breast Cancer Treatment: A Look at the Options
Breast Reconstruction
Breast Self-Examination
Mammography: What Every Woman Should Know

Books

Man to Man: When the Woman You Love Has Breast Cancer
The Race is Run One Step at a Time
