

How Does Exercise Help?

According to research exercise during cancer treatment:

- Helps get chemotherapy drugs to their target by increasing blood flow
- Decreases treatment related fatigue
- Improves muscle strength, sleep quality and mood.
- Helps to restore shoulder range of motion
- Helps with weight management
- Shown to reduce incidence of some cancers.
- Reduces inflammation and increases blood flow in the body
- Decreases likelihood of having to either reduce chemotherapy dose or take a break from chemotherapy
- Muscle contraction helps lymphatic flow and does not make lymphedema worse

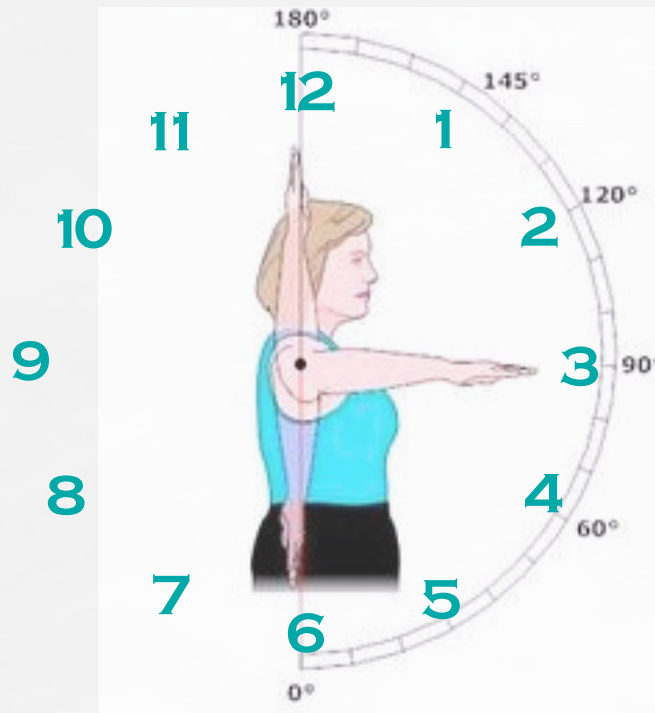
Exercise

Recommendations

- Start by moving more and sitting less.
- Best to start with supervised exercise.
- Start slow and gradually increase exercise time per week.
- Incorporate a balance of cardio, muscle strengthening and stretching exercise.
- Do what makes you smile!



Self Assessment



- take note of how your arm moves using either degrees or clock time.
- Mark your results in a journal.
- Start by moving your arm up and out in front of you as high as it will go. Make note and return your arm back to your side.
- Now, move your arm out to the side and up as far as it will go. Make note and return your arm to your side.
- Can you reach behind your head and touch the top of your opposite side shoulder blade?
- Can you reach behind your back and touch the bottom of your opposite side shoulder blade?

Shoulder Troubles & Breast Cancer Treatment

Why Exercise is Important

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According to Research

- Women who have had a mastectomy experience greater difficulty with shoulder movement after surgery than those who had a lumpectomy.
- Axillary (armpit) dissection (lymph node removal) contributes to limitations in arm mobility more than sentinel node removal.
- Scar tissue, radiation, previous injury, preoperative physical health and immobility of arm after surgery play a role in shoulder mobility impairment.

Signs That You May Have Shoulder Mobility Problems

Difficulty with the following:

- Raising your arm
- Pulling on a sweater or top over your head
- Fastening your bra
- Zipping up a back zipper
- Reaching up to a top shelf
- Combing or brushing your hair
- signs of AWS/cording (see AWS pamphlet)

Consult with a physiotherapist if you continue to have these issues a month after surgery.



Pre-operative Strategies

- Do a self range of motion assessment (see back page of pamphlet)
- In your journal, write down any history of injury to your surgical side arm or shoulder you may have had in the past (ie: rotator cuff tear).
- Get a dedicated stretch/exercise calendar
- Start a gentle stretch routine prior to surgery.
- It is a good idea to download the suggested post-op exercises listed in this pamphlet and try some to become familiar with them and the timing of when you should start them. Mark on your calendar the expected progression dates for advancing your stretch/exercise routine.
- If you feel uncomfortable doing stretches on your own, now is a good time to seek out a physiotherapist who has experience with breast cancer surgery patients. You can even make a pre-op appointment to have them assess your shoulder function to get a baseline. If you wish you can also make post-op appointments starting about 2-weeks after your surgery.
- Check with your surgeon about when to begin post-op exercises and write it in your journal.



Post-operative Strategies

- Pain after surgery can stop you from moving and change your posture. Keep ahead of your pain by following your doctor's advice for pain control.
- Drink plenty of water. Water helps to keep body tissues soft and is essential for healing.
- Deep breathing has many benefits. It can help reduce pain and nausea. It helps with relaxation and it exercises the muscles of the rib cage. Most importantly after surgery, it helps lung function after anesthesia.
- Some women will have drains in place for up to 10 days. Lifting your arm more than shoulder height is not recommended while they are in place. Gentle movements with muscle contraction of the hand, wrist and elbow can be done during this time as can shoulder shrugs and rolls as tolerated.
- Check with your oncology team for a cancer exercise program running in your area (ie: UW Well-fit program). A referral is usually needed.
- Start your post-op exercises/stretchers as soon as you can to help get your arm mobile enough to get into "radiation position"
- Do your self assessment at 2,4 & 6 weeks after surgery.

Resources

1. *Exercise After Breast Surgery*. Canadian Cancer Society. Download from: <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/resources/publications/exercises-after-breast-surgery>
2. *Functional Rehab After Breast Cancer Surgery*. University Health Network. Download from: https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Your_Functional_Rehabilitation_After_Breast_Surgery.pdf