

BREAST SURGERY RECOVERY



Lowe Plastic Surgery (LPS)

GUIDEBOOK

Approved 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.

Reach for Recovery provides similar information and programs

www.cancer.org

****This exercise program is not allowed for 30 days after reconstruction!***

Exercises After Breast Surgery

Breast surgery can affect arm movement

Many women with breast cancer have some kind of surgery, even though other kinds of treatment are also done. You might have had one or more of these procedures:

- Breast biopsy
- Lymph node biopsy or removal
- Breast conservation surgery (lumpectomy)
- Mastectomy
- Breast reconstruction

Any of these surgeries can affect how well you can move your shoulder and arm, take a deep breath, or do your daily activities, like dressing, bathing, and combing your hair. Pain and stiffness can cause weakness and limit movement of the arm and shoulder.

Exercises can help restore movement

No matter what type of surgery you had, it is important to do exercises afterward to get the arm and shoulder moving again. Exercises help to decrease any side effects of your surgery and help you get back to your usual activities.

If you have radiation therapy after surgery, exercises are even more important to help keep your arm and shoulder flexible. Even if you don't have surgery, radiation therapy may affect your arm and shoulder long after treatment is finished. Because of this, it is important to develop a regular habit of doing exercises to maintain arm and shoulder mobility after radiation treatments for breast cancer.

It is very important to talk with your doctor before starting any exercises so that you can decide on a program that is right for you. Your doctor might suggest you see a physical therapist or occupational therapist, or a cancer exercise specialist certified by the American College of Sport Medicine. These health professionals are specially trained to design an exercise program just for you. You might need this kind of help if you do not have full use of your arm within 3 to 4 weeks of surgery.

Some exercises should not be done until drains and sutures (stitches) are removed. But some exercises can be done soon after surgery. The exercises that increase your ability to move your shoulder and arm can usually be started in a few days. Exercises to help make your arm stronger are added later.

Here are some of the more common exercises that women do after breast surgery. Talk to your doctor or therapist about which of these are right for you and when you should start doing them.

The week after surgery

These tips and exercises listed below should be done for the first 3 to 7 days after surgery. Do not begin until you get the OK from your doctor.

- Use your affected arm (on the side where your surgery was) as you normally would when you comb your hair, bathe, get dressed, and eat.
- Lie down and raise your affected arm above the level of your heart for 45 minutes. Do this 2 or 3 times a day. Put your arm on pillows so that your hand is higher than your wrist and your elbow is a little higher than your shoulder. This will help decrease the swelling that may happen after surgery.
- Exercise your affected arm while it is raised above the level of your heart by opening and closing your hand 15 to 25 times. Next, bend and straighten your elbow. Repeat this 3 to 4 times a day. This exercise helps reduce swelling by pumping lymph fluid out of your arm.
- Practice deep breathing exercises (using your diaphragm) at least 6 times a day. Lie down on your back and take a slow, deep breath. Breathe in as much air as you can while trying to expand your chest and abdomen (push your belly button away from your spine). Relax and breathe out. Repeat this 4 or 5 times. This exercise will help maintain normal movement of your chest, making it easier for your lungs to work. Do deep breathing exercises often.
- Do not sleep on your affected arm or lie on that side.

Getting started: general guidelines

The exercises described here can be done as soon as your doctor says it's OK. They are usually started a week or more after surgery. Be sure to talk to your doctor before trying any of them. Here are some things to keep in mind after breast surgery:

- You will feel some tightness in your chest and armpit after surgery. This is normal, and the tightness will decrease as you do your exercises.
- Many women have burning, tingling, numbness, or soreness on the back of the arm and/or on the chest wall. This is because the surgery can irritate some of your nerves. These feelings might increase a few weeks after surgery. But keep doing your exercises unless you notice unusual swelling or tenderness. (If this happens, let your doctor know about it right away.) Sometimes rubbing or stroking the area with your hand or a soft cloth can help make the area less sensitive.
- It may be helpful to do the exercises after a warm shower when muscles are warm and relaxed.
- Wear comfortable, loose clothing when doing the exercises.
- Do the movements slowly until you feel a gentle stretch. Hold each stretch at the end of the motion and slowly count to 5. It is normal to feel some pulling as you stretch the skin and muscles

that have been shortened because of the surgery. Do not bounce or make any jerky movements when doing any of the exercises. You should not feel pain as you do them, only gentle stretching.

- Do each exercise 5 to 7 times. Try to do each exercise correctly. If you have trouble with the exercises, talk to your doctor. You may need to be referred to a physical or occupational therapist.
- Do the exercises twice a day until you get back your normal flexibility.
- Be sure to take deep breaths, in and out, as you do each exercise.
- The exercises are set up so that you start them lying down, move to sitting, and finish them standing up.

Exercises to do while lying down

Do these exercises on a bed or the floor. Lie on your back with your knees and hips bent and your feet flat.

Wand exercise (Figure 1)

This exercise helps increase the ability to move your shoulders forward. You will need a broom handle, yardstick, dowel, or other stick-like object to use as the wand in this exercise.

- Hold the wand across your belly in both hands with your palms facing up.
- Lift the wand up over your head as far as you can. Use your unaffected arm to help lift the wand until you feel a stretch in your affected arm.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Lower arms and repeat 5 to 7 times.



Figure 1

Elbow winging (Figure 2)

This exercise helps increase the movement in the front of your chest and shoulder. It may take many weeks of regular exercise before your elbows will get close to the bed or floor.

- Clasp your hands behind your neck with your elbows pointing toward the ceiling.
- Move your elbows apart and down toward the bed or floor.
- Repeat 5 to 7 times.

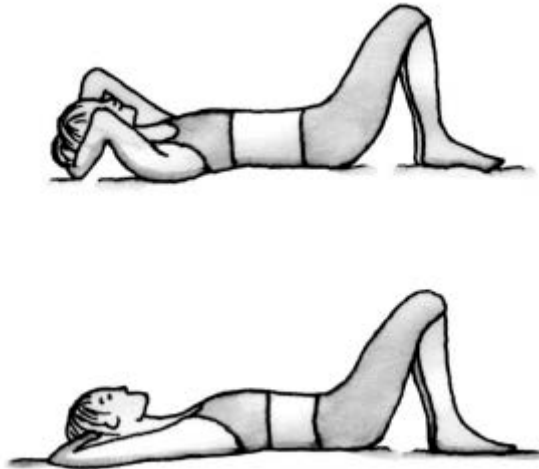


Figure 2

Exercises to do while sitting up Shoulder blade stretch (Figure 3)

This exercise helps increase your shoulder blade movement.

- Sit in a chair very close to a table with your back against the back of the chair.
- Place the unaffected arm on the table with your elbow bent and palm down. Do not move this arm during the exercise.
- Place the affected arm on the table, palm down, with your elbow straight.
- Without moving your trunk, slide the affected arm forward, toward the opposite side of the table. You should feel your shoulder blade move as you do this.
- Relax your arm and repeat 5 to 7 times.



Figure 3

Shoulder blade squeeze (Figure 4)

This exercise also helps increase shoulder blade movement.

- Facing straight ahead, sit in a chair in front of a mirror. Do not rest against the back of the chair.
- Your arms should be at your sides with your elbows bent.
- Squeeze your shoulder blades together, bringing your elbows behind you. Keep your shoulders level as you do this. Do not lift your shoulders up toward your ears.
- Return to the starting position and repeat 5 to 7 times.

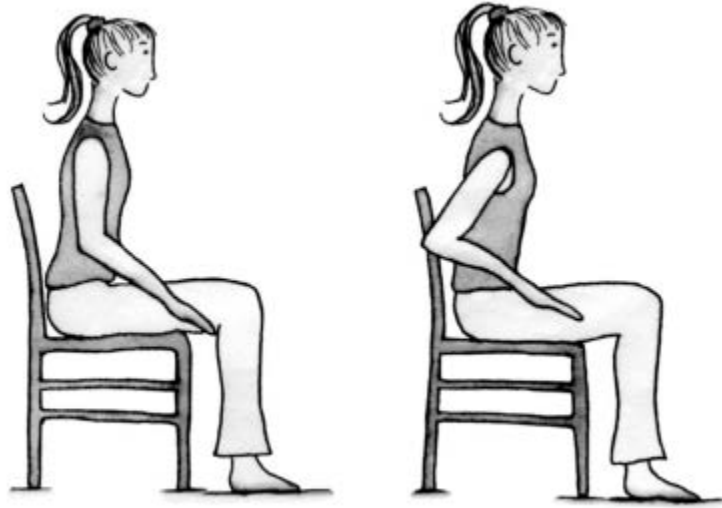


Figure 4

Side bending (Figure 5)

This exercise helps increase movement of your trunk and body.

- Sit in a chair and clasp your hands together in front of you. Lift your arms slowly over your head, straightening your arms.
- When your arms are over your head, bend your trunk to the right. Bend at your waist and keep your arms overhead.
- Return to the starting position and bend to the left.
- Repeat 5 to 7 times.

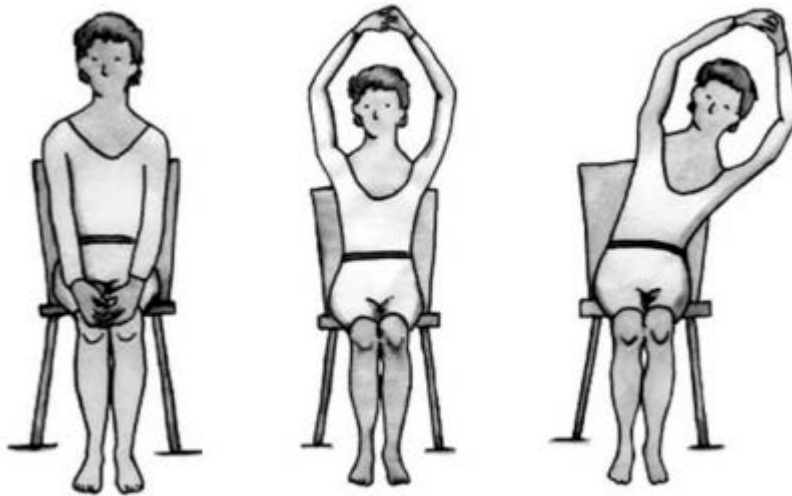


Figure 5

Exercises to do while standing

Chest wall stretch (Figure 6)

This exercise helps stretch your chest.

- Stand facing a corner with your toes about 8 to 10 inches from the corner.
- Bend your elbows and put your forearms on the wall, one on each side of the corner. Your elbows should be as close to shoulder height as possible.
- Keep your arms and feet in place and move your chest toward the corner. You will feel a stretch across your chest and shoulders.
- Return to the starting position and repeat 5 to 7 times.
- The picture shows stretching both sides at the same time, but you may find it more comfortable to stretch one arm at a time.
- Be sure you keep your shoulders dropped far away from your ears as you do this stretch.



Figure 6

Shoulder stretch (Figure 7)

This exercise helps increase the mobility in your shoulder.

- Stand facing the wall with your toes about 8 to 10 inches from the wall.
- Put your hands on the wall. Use your fingers to "climb the wall," reaching as high as you can until you feel a stretch.
- Return to the starting position and repeat 5 to 7 times.
- The picture shows both arms going up at the same time, but you may find it easier to raise one arm at a time.
- Be sure you keep your shoulders dropped far away from your ears as you raise your arms.

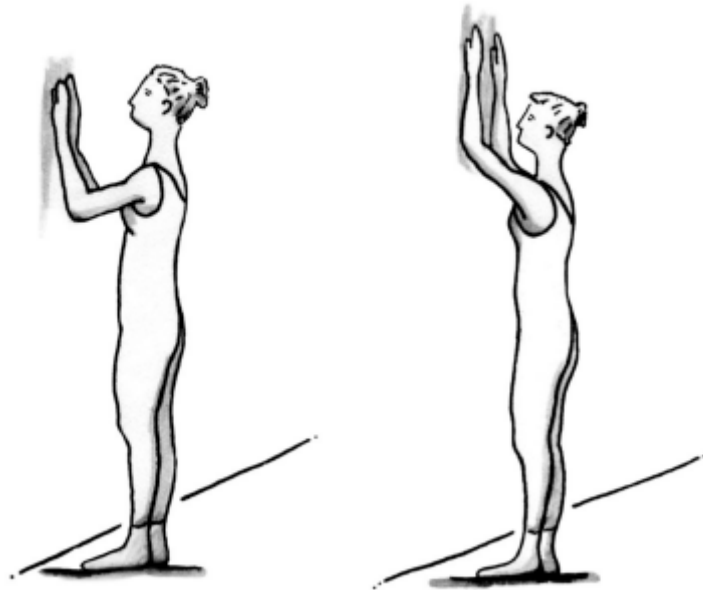


Figure 7

Things to keep in mind

Start exercising slowly and increase it as you are able. Stop exercising and talk to your doctor right away if you:

- Get weaker, start losing your balance, or start falling
- Have pain that gets worse
- Have new heaviness, aching, tightness, or other strange sensations in your arm
- Have unusual swelling or swelling gets worse
- Have headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, new numbness, or tingling in your arms or chest

It is important to exercise to keep your muscles working as well as possible, but it is also important to be safe. Talk with your doctor about the right kind of exercises for your condition, and then set goals for increasing your level of physical activity.

Other kinds of exercise

Exercise to help improve aerobic (heart-lung) capacity is also important for women who have had breast cancer. There is evidence that fitness and weight loss may even help reduce the risk of recurrence for some types of cancer. Ask your doctor about fitness exercises during and after breast cancer treatment.

Other exercises are designed to help reduce your risk of lymphedema, or chronic swelling in the arm on the side where you had surgery. The exercises shown above are mainly designed to help regain range of motion (flexibility) of the arm and shoulder. Ask your doctor about your lymphedema risk and if you should use exercises to help reduce that risk. You may need a referral to a lymphedema expert. For more on this, see our document called *Lymphedema: What Every Woman With Breast Cancer Should Know*.

Strengthening exercises are now recommended as part of regular exercise programs to improve health. These are not started until 4 to 6 weeks after surgery, and must be tailored to your general health, medical condition, and fitness. Strength building starts by using small hand weights, and is increased slowly over time. Again, this is best addressed with your doctor or physical therapist. It is probably best to start a strengthening program in a supervised setting with a cancer exercise trainer or physical therapist to be sure you are doing the exercises properly.

This information was developed with assistance from the Oncology Section of the American Physical Therapy Association.

References

Anderson RT, Kimmick GG, McCoy TP, et al. A randomized trial of exercise on well-being and function following breast cancer surgery: the RESTORE trial. *J Cancer Surviv*. 2012 Jun;6(2):172-181.

McNeely ML, Campbell K, Ospina M, et al. Exercise interventions for upper-limb dysfunction due to breast cancer treatment. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2010 Jun 16;(6):CD005211.

NLN Medical Advisory Committee. Position Statement of the National Lymphedema Network: Exercise. December 2011. Accessed at <http://www.lymphnet.org/pdfDocs/nlnexercise.pdf> on January 22, 2013.

Petito EL, Nazário AC, Martinelli SE, Facina G, De Gutiérrez MG. Application of a domicile-based exercise program for shoulder rehabilitation after breast cancer surgery. *Rev Lat Am Enfermagem*. 2012 Jan-Feb;20(1):35-43.

No matter who you are, we can help. Contact us anytime, day or night, for cancer-related information and support. Call us at **1-800-227-2345** or visit www.cancer.org.

SOME DO'S AND DON'TS FOR EXERCISE

Do not exercise for more than 15 - 30 minutes at one time. Get permission with your reconstructive surgeon before initiating exercise as each patient and each clinical situation is different. 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. If you have undergone immediate breast reconstruction do not do exercises for one month or until approved by your board certified plastic surgeon. If you have chosen to delay reconstruction the breast surgeon will provide you with exercise information at request.

GOING HOME INSTRUCTIONS

Things you may do:

- Shower with soap and water after 2 days or when your surgeon tells you
- You may take a shallow tub bath if you must weekly (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. Do not exercise or do no heavy lifting for 4-6 weeks.
- 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 or stress than usual.
- Elevate your arm when convenient or when reclining.

Things you may do when approved by your physician:

- Drive the car. Do not drive until all pain medications or sedatives are discontinued
- Continue and increase your arm exercises.
- At 4-6 weeks patients are usually unrestricted
- 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 Plastic Surgeon, Dr James Lowe (405) 942-4300, for visit.

Appointment Date: _____

Appointment Time: _____

Call Breast Surgeon, _____, for visit.

Appointment Date: _____

Appointment Time: _____

Call Oncologist, _____, for visit.

Appointment Date: _____

Appointment Time: _____

Call Other Specialist, _____, for visit.

Appointment Date: _____

Appointment Time: _____

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 surgical oncologist's staff usually has a number of educational pamphlets. One pamphlet is "How to Examine Your Breasts," and this 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). Further information can be found at: www.cancer.org or <http://www.cancer.org/treatment/supportprogramsservices/reach-to-recovery>

INSTRUCTIONS FOR JACKSON PRATT (JP) BULB CARE

Review first Dr. James Lowe's drain instruction sheet for full details and information

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. Measure the drain output and record on a sheet of paper two times a day.
5. The drain output can be measured in the bulb or by transferring to a small cup.
6. Open the valve (bulb will expand) and gently squeeze fluid from the bulb into the cup to empty it completely.
7. Squeeze the bulb tightly and close the valve (this reactivates the suction).
8. Repin the bulb to your Surgi-Bra or bra.
9. Always bring to your recorded output sheet to your appointments.

Record fluid of JP bulb:

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

Your physician will want to see 24-hour totals at every visit. The drains are made to allow for showering but not submerging in a bath. It is best to attached drains to a belt or waistband to free hands when showering. 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 Vaseline Ointment for comfort infrequently using a clean Q-tip or cotton.
3. Do this twice a day, morning and afternoon.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Brochures from the American Cancer Society & 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

