Exercises After a Mastectomy or Lymph Node Removal

If you have had a mastectomy or lymph nodes removed, ask your doctor when you may start exercises. Do not start any exercises until your doctor says it is okay. Your drainage tubes should be removed before you begin exercising.

You may use the involved arm (the arm on the same side as the mastectomy or the arm that had lymph nodes removed) for daily activities such as washing your face, combing your hair, and getting dressed.

Range of Motion/Strengthening Exercises

- Do only the exercises marked by your physical therapist.
- Do these exercises slowly and gently.
- Call your physical therapist if you have any questions or concerns.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Lie down on your back.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and place the other hand on your belly. Use your hands to feel the movements as you breathe.
- Take a breath in through your nose and feel your hand on your stomach move outward.
- Breathe out slowly and gently through your mouth with pursed lips as if you were blowing out a candle. The hand on your stomach will move in as you breathe out.
- Breathe out (exhale) at least twice as long as you did to inhale.
- Do this exercise ________ times, ________ times a day.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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Shoulder Flexion with Wand

- Lie down on your back.
- Hold the wand flat across your hips with your elbows straight and palms down.
- 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 the involved arm (arm on the same side as mastectomy or arm that had lymph nodes removed).
- Hold for 5 seconds then lower your arms.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.

Shoulder Abduction with Wand

- Lie down on your back.
- Hold the wand flat across your hips with the palm of unaffected arm facing down and the palm of involved arm facing up.
- Move the wand toward the affected side, pushing up like the motion used to make a snow angel. Use your unaffected arm to help move the wand until you feel a stretch in your involved arm.
- Hold for 5 seconds then return to the original position.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.

Shoulder Depression

- Lie down on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Put your arms straight by your side.
- As you exhale, press your shoulders away from your ears like you are reaching for your feet.
- Hold for 3 seconds then relax.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.
Snow Angel

- Lie down on your back. If you need to support your neck, put a rolled-up towel under your head.
- Your arms should be straight with the palms of your hands facing the ceiling.
- Slide your arms up and down on the floor. You should only move your arms as far as you can and still be comfortable.
- Hold for 3 seconds then relax.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.

“T” and “Y” Stretch

- Lie on your back with your arms stretched out to the side in a “T” position. You should feel a comfortable stretch across your chest.
- Hold this position for _______ seconds.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.
- Do this exercise with your arms stretched out to the side in a “Y” position. You should feel a comfortable stretch across your chest.
- Hold this position for _______ seconds.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.

Butterfly Wings

- Lie on your back.
- Place your hands behind your head and clasp your fingers together.
- Slowly lower your elbows toward the floor until you feel a comfortable stretch across your chest.
- Hold for _______ seconds.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.
**Forward Pinky Slide**

- Stand facing a wall. Extend your involved arm directly in front of you so that your forearm rests on the wall with your pinky against the wall.
- Take a step in towards the wall, allowing your arm to slide up so that your pinky is the only finger in contact with the wall.
- Continue until you feel a comfortable stretch.
- Hold this position for _______ seconds.
- Slowly step back and lower your arm down the wall until you have returned to the starting position.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.

**Sideways Pinky Slide**

- Stand close to a wall. Place your forearm and pinky against the wall. Slide your forearm and hand up the wall until you feel a comfortable stretch.
- Lean towards the wall for a stronger stretch.
- Hold for _______ seconds.
- Slowly step back to lower your arm down the wall until you have returned to the starting position.
- Do this exercise _______ times, _______ times a day.
Median Nerve Glide

Only do the numbered steps of this process until you feel the first change in sensation (ex: tingling, burning, etc.). When you feel this change, then you may advance to the arm on the same side as the mastectomy or arm that had lymph nodes removed.

1. Keep your shoulder down and raise your involved arm directly out to the side to shoulder height.
2. Bend your elbow to 90 degrees.
3. Rotate your arm back like you are going to throw a ball.
4. Turn your palm towards your face.
5. Bend your wrist back towards the floor.
6. Extend your fingers.
7. Straighten your elbow.

Once you feel the first change in sensation, you can include the following steps with this exercise.

- Bring your ear to the shoulder on the same side while straightening your elbow at the same time.
- Return your head and arm to the starting position then repeat in the other direction (ear to opposite shoulder while completely bending the elbow).
- Do this exercise ________ times, ________ times a day.
- You can also “stretch” the nerve by straightening your elbow while you keep your head in a neutral position until you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold this position for ________ seconds.
- Do this exercise ________ times, ________ times a day.
- You can continue this stretch by bringing your ear to the opposite shoulder as you straighten your elbow.