

Exercises after a breast reconstruction with a latissimus dorsi flap

Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

Produced: November 2023

Review: November 2026

Leaflet number: 1452 Version: 1

Introduction

This leaflet has some exercises that will help you recover at a safe and steady rate after your breast reconstruction surgery. By following this advice, you can

- Prevent shoulder stiffness and regain full movement in your shoulder. This can help you get into the right position for radiotherapy (if needed) and for imaging.
- reduce the risk of chest infections whilst less active.
- get help with your circulation and healing of your scar tissue.

Your breast has been reconstructed using the muscle in your back called latissimus dorsi. The muscle is below your shoulder in your upper back. The breast is made using an oval flap of skin, fat, muscle and blood vessels from your back. This is moved around to the front to form a new breast.

It is common after this surgery to have some pain and stiffness in your shoulder. This should improve after a short time with some simple shoulder exercises.

Day 1: after your surgery

When you wake up from surgery you may have

- a drain/s (a thin plastic tube) coming from your breast and back. This aims to prevent fluid collection and reduce swelling. This will be removed usually in 3 to 5 days.
- a drip in your arm to give you pain medication.
- an oxygen mask on your face. This makes sure you breath in a high level of oxygen. It helps with your healing.
- a catheter in your bladder . This collects your pee (urine) so you do not have to go to the toilet until you are feeling better.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

These are normal after this type of surgery and are helpful for your recovery.

If you are feeling well enough, your physiotherapist will ask you to:

- get out of bed and into the chair, helped by the nursing staff or physiotherapists.
- increase how far you walk over the next few days.

There are 3 main areas that the physiotherapist will talk you through:

1. your chest and breathing
2. your circulation
3. your shoulders

Breathing exercises

After surgery it is normal for your breathing to be shallow. Deep breathing exercises can help to open your airways and clear any fluid that might build up.

Repeat 3 times every 2 hours.

- Take 3 slow, deep breaths, trying to fill all of your lungs
- Feel your bottom ribs and chest expand
- Hold for 3 to 5 seconds
- Breathe out through your mouth
- Do a huff by forcing your breath out quickly
- Finish with a strong cough. Rest and then repeat the cycle

Circulation exercises

- For good circulation, try to start gentle leg exercises. You can do this in the chair or in the bed
- Tap your toes by moving your ankles up and down
- Bend and straighten your knees 1 at a time
- Repeat each exercise 10 times, every 1 to 2 hours until you are more active with your walking.



Getting out of bed

If you are feeling well enough, your nurse and physiotherapist can help you get out of bed and onto the chair. Your physiotherapist will ask you to walk as much as pain allows over the next few days.

Shoulder exercises

Day 1 to 3

You should start to move your shoulder with some gentle exercises to prevent stiffness.

Repeat each exercise 5 to 10 times, 3 times a day. These exercises should be comfortable



1. Gently shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and then relax



2. Link your hands together and gently bring your hands forwards to shoulder height.

Do not lift your arms above 90 degrees.



3. Lift your arm out to the side up to shoulder height.

Do not lift your arms above 90 degrees.



4. Take your hand to the back of your head, then to the base of your back on the same side.

Remember to take your time with these exercises. If you are having any problems, ask a member of the nursing team to contact the physiotherapists.

Day 4 onwards

You are likely to be back on your feet and gently walking to the bathroom and around your room.

You can now do your shoulder exercises as long as they are comfortable. It is now safe to take your arm above shoulder height.

Remember it is important to listen to your body, do not overdo the exercises.

If you feel pain or tiredness, take a break. It is normal to feel a gentle stretch with these exercises.

Repeat these exercises 5 to 10 times, 3 times a day.



1. Slide your hand up the wall forwards as far as you feel comfortable to.
2. Slide your hand up the wall sideways as far as you feel comfortable to.



3. Clasp your hands together, reach forwards and round your upper back, pushing your shoulder blades forwards. Feel a gentle stretch across your back.

Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



4. Raise your operated arm over your head and lean towards the opposite side. Feel a stretch under your arm and down your side.

Hold for 5 to 10 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.

Returning to normal activities

When should it start?

Every breast reconstruction is unique. No 2 women who have it have the same expectations or way of life. You need to follow the advice that your doctor gives you and attend your physiotherapy appointments. This is where they will tell you when it is safe to start doing different activities.

In the early stages of healing, it is important to wear the right bra. This will help to support your breast while it is healing. Nursing staff, who are trained and experienced in this area, will be able to guide you. These tips will give you basic clues as to whether or not it is safe to get back to normal daily tasks.

This depends on a number of factors: your surgery, outcome, healing, any other health problems you may have and the medical advice your surgeon, nursing staff and therapists have given you.

- Heavy housework weeks
- Driving (check with insurance) weeks
- Return to work weeks
- Return to sportweeks

Physiotherapy follow-up

You will get an outpatient appointment to see a physiotherapist.

This is to:

- check that your shoulder is moving and working well.
- it is getting back to normal after your surgery.
- see if you need any further advice to help you with your recovery.

If you cannot attend please **contact the relevant department** to change the appointment.

Physiotherapy Department, University Hospital Leicester (UHL): 0116 2585816

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk