

Physiotherapy after neck dissection

Patient information

Introduction

The exercises and information in this leaflet are designed to help you recover after your operation and improve the movement and strength in your neck and shoulders.

The exercises are given as a general guideline and may vary slightly depending on the type of operation you have had. The physiotherapist may visit you and give you special advice.

If you are in doubt about the information given in this booklet, please ask the physiotherapist on the ward.

What is a neck dissection?

A neck dissection is an operation to remove lymph nodes on one or both sides of your neck. This may also involve the nerves and muscles in the area. An incision made on your neck allows the surgeon to access your neck and mouth.

It is a common procedure for patients undergoing treatment for head and neck cancers and tissues removed will be sent to the laboratory for testing to see if the cancer has spread.

Why should I exercise after?

Following surgery it is important that you start to exercise, moving your shoulders and neck as normally as possible.

Movement may be reduced after surgery because of swelling, the position of any drains and stitches in your skin.

Gentle exercise will help to reduce swelling and help prevent stiffness in your neck and shoulders which may lead to pain.

What exercises should I do?

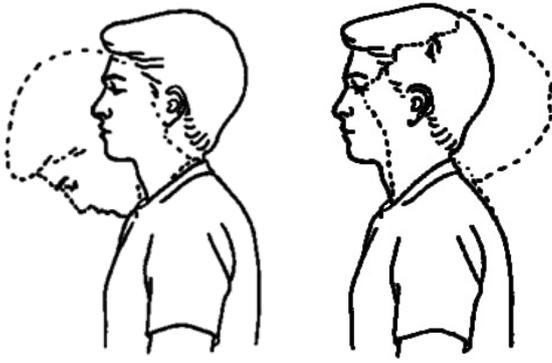
Exercises should be done gently and slowly, do not force movement. They should not cause pain but you may feel slight discomfort and a stretching sensation.

You may start your exercises once all of the drains have been removed so that you are able to move your neck freely. They can be started before all the clips or stitches are removed.

Exercise should be done little and often. Aim to complete each exercise three to five times a day.

These exercises can be completed in either sitting or standing.

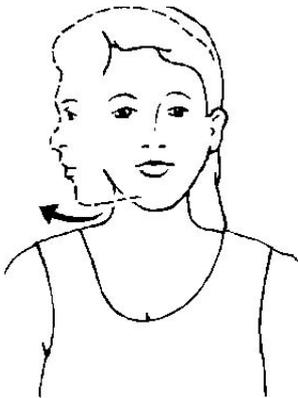
Neck exercises



Tilt your head down towards your chest, hold for 5 seconds until you feel a gentle stretch at the back of your neck. Return to the centre. Now look up towards the ceiling until you feel a gentle stretch, hold and try to keep your lips closed. Repeat 5 times in each direction.



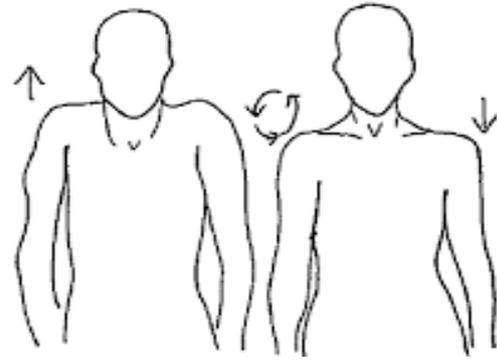
Bend your head to the side, trying to bring your ear as close to your shoulder as you can. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Hold for 5 seconds then return to the centre. Repeat on both sides, 5 times each direction.



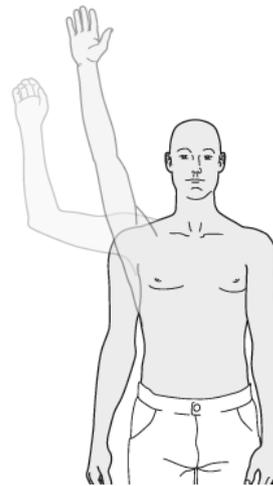
Only start this exercise after you have been reviewed in out-patients and received confirmation to start.

Turn your head towards one side as though looking over your shoulder, keeping your chin at the same heights and moving within comfortable limits. Return your head to the centre and repeat on the opposite side. Repeat 5 times on each side.

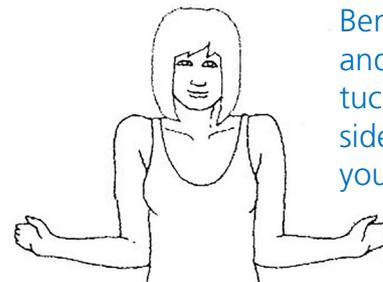
Shoulder exercises



Lift your shoulders up towards your ears as though shrugging your shoulders, hold for a few seconds and gently lower as far as you can, then relax. As you feel more confident with this exercise; lift your shoulders upwards, gently roll them backwards as though opening up your chest. Repeat each exercise 5 times.



Lift your arms up one at a time; let your thumb lead the way. Only go as far as is comfortable, gradually increasing the movement with time. Repeat 5 times on each arm.



Bend your elbows and keep them tucked into your sides. Gently move your forearms outwards and back again. Repeat 5 times.

Further information

Additional information can be found at:

Cancer Research UK

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

www.csp.org

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