

*The* ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

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# Exercises and advice following your your thoracotomy

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**Physiotherapy**

**Patient Information**

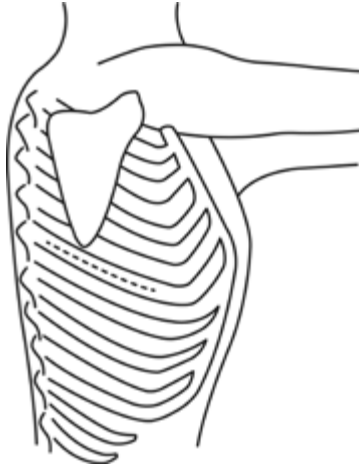


**NHS**



## Introduction

After you have had an operation involving the side of your body, you may feel reluctant to move your arm. In order to regain full use of it as soon as possible, it is important to do the exercises as recommended in this booklet.



The exercises are performed in three stages:

Set A

Set B

Set C

Please follow the guidelines on the next page, which advise when to progress your exercises.

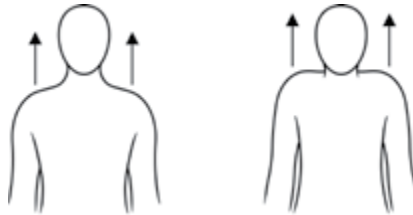
If you are unsure when you should progress your exercises, please contact the Physiotherapy Department (contact details on page 9).

## Set A exercises

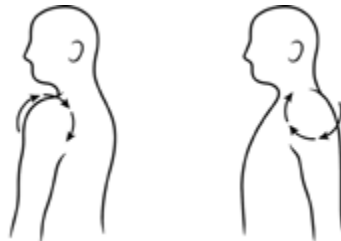
**Start these exercises from the first day after your operation.**

They should be performed three times a day, sitting on a chair if possible. **Repeat each exercise 5 times per session.**

1. Sitting upright with your arms relaxed by your side, shrug your shoulders up towards your ears then slowly return to starting position.



2. Sitting upright with your arms relaxed by your side, slowly rotate your shoulders backwards as far as you comfortably can.



3. Place your hand on your shoulder (same side). Raise your elbow forwards to shoulder height and then back down.



4. Place your hand on your shoulder (same side). Raise your elbow up to shoulder height out to the side, and then back down to your side.



5. Clasp your hands behind your neck. Keeping your head up, push your elbows out to the side and then back to the middle.



6. Place your hand behind your back and reach up as far as possible between your shoulder blades. Hold for 5 seconds, then relax back to the start position.



## Set B exercises

Continues with Set A exercises and start **Set B exercises one week after your operation. Repeat each exercise 5 times per session.**

1. Place your arm by your side with your elbow straight. Raise your arm forwards and up above your head. Then slowly bring it back down, keeping your elbow as straight as possible.



2. Place your arm by your side with your elbow straight. Raise your arm out to the side away from your body, turning the palm of your hand upwards and continue up towards your head. Then slowly bring your arm back down again.



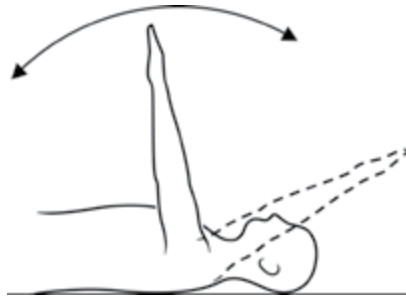
3. Fold your arms on top of each other in front of you then turn your upper body to your right side, keeping your bottom half still. Hold for 5 seconds then return to the middle. Repeat on the left side.



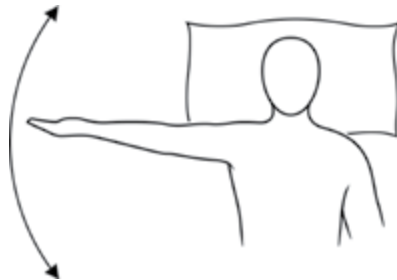
## Set C exercises/stretchers

**Start Set C exercises/stretchers 10-14 days after your operation. Repeat each exercise 5 times per session.** You may experience some discomfort with your exercises but they should not be painful.

1. Starting with your arm by your side and your elbow straight, raise your arm forwards and up above your head. Hold it in this position for a count of 10 and then slowly bring your arm back down to your side.



2. Starting with your arm by your side and your elbow straight, raise your arm out to the side away from your body and continue up toward your head. (Do not allow your arm to creep forward). Keep your arm in this position for a count of 10 and then slowly bring it back down to your side.



3. Clasp your hands behind your neck, with your elbows pointing towards the ceiling (ensure your head remains on the pillow). Stretch your elbows out to the side, trying to touch the bed or floor with them. Keep them in this position for a count of 10 and then slowly bring them back in so that they are pointing at the ceiling again.



4. Place your hands at shoulder height on a wall and slowly bend your elbows, bringing your upper body closer to the wall. Hold for 5 seconds, and then straighten your elbows to bring yourself to the start position.





## Post-operative advice:

- **Walking** – It is extremely important that you sit out of bed and start moving around as soon as possible. You should aim to walk the length of the ward and back each day. Try to walk at a pace that requires you to breathe deeper. If you are unable to move away from your bed space, try marching on the spot until you feel slightly breathless. By doing this you will help; maintain the strength in your legs, reduce your risk of chest infections and help prevent deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism.
- **Sport and exercise** – As soon as you feel well enough you may want to do more physical exercise, and you should build up slowly. Try to avoid any vigorous twisting or bending movements for the first six weeks. Your recovery is a gradual process.
- **Driving** – You should not drive for approximately 4-6 weeks after your operation. When you resume driving, you should feel able to do an emergency stop without feeling any discomfort. Your surgical team will advise you further on this (if you do drive before you are permitted it may invalidate your insurance).
- **Flying** – You must not fly for at least six weeks after your operation. This is because the change in air pressure may affect the expansion of your lungs. Please speak to your surgical team for specific advice as you should be reviewed in clinic before flying.
- **Sexual activity** – Many patients who have had thoracic surgery experience anxiety about resuming a sexual relationship. It is safe to do this whenever you feel ready, however sensible measures should be taken to avoid any excessive strain on your arms or chest.

- **Bathing** – For the first few weeks it is advisable to use a shower instead of a bath. This is due to the physical effort of lowering yourself into the bath with your arms, along with prolonged submersion of surgical sites in water. If you have no other option but to use a bath, remember to empty the water out of the bath before you get out and use a non-slip mat. We advise to thoroughly pat dry the surgical site.
- **Mood** – After surgery, your mood and feeling may vary from day to day. It may take a while to adjust physically and emotionally to what has happened. You may find it useful to speak to your GP or specialist nurse.
- **Return to work** – You should allow yourself the time to recover physically and emotionally before returning to work. When you return to work depends on the nature of the job you do. It is sensible to take at least four weeks off to recover before returning to a desk-based job, but for physical jobs this may be much longer.

**Please speak to your physiotherapist or consultant if you have questions about your specific circumstances.**

## Contact details

If you have any questions, please contact your physiotherapist:

**Chelsea** 0207 808 2821

**Sutton** 0208 661 3098

(Monday to Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm)

Alternatively, please call:

**The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:** 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

## Sources of information and support

### Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

**Telephone:** 020 7306 6666 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm)

**Website:** *www.csp.org.uk*

CSP provides information on NHS and private physiotherapists with a special interest in cancer care and in women's health.

They also produce public information leaflets.

### Macmillan Cancer Support

**Macmillan Support Line:** 0808 808 0000

(7 days a week, 8am–8pm)

**Website:** *www.macmillan.org.uk*

Macmillan provides free information and emotional support for people living with cancer and can signpost local cancer support groups and organisations near you.

## Notes and questions

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## References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: [patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk](mailto:patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk)

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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[royalmarsden.org](http://royalmarsden.org)

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