Exercises and advice following your breast surgery and axillary node clearance (ANC)

This leaflet gives information to people who have had breast surgery. It contains exercises that your physiotherapist and breast care nurse would like you to perform. The leaflet also contains general advice to help you get back to your normal daily routine. Contact telephone numbers are listed at the end of the leaflet.

**Why exercise?**
Physiotherapy is extremely important following your breast surgery to minimise the loss of shoulder movement and function on your operated side. The exercises in this booklet will prevent stiffness and keep the scar mobile after your surgery.

Exercise will also help to strengthen your arm muscles, relieve and control pain and aid in tissue healing.

It is common to feel a pulling or stretching sensation when you start exercising.

Make sure you take your pain killers regularly, especially before your exercises - as prescribed by your doctor. This will allow your arm to move more freely.

General guidelines when exercising:
- Make time for your exercises in your daily routine
- Take note of the timing advice with the exercises below and if you’re not sure please ask your breast care nurse
- Do the exercises slowly, smoothly and gently
- Have a short rest between each exercise
- Remember to follow the guidance in this booklet

If you experience continuing pain and this worsens, then ask for further advice from your physiotherapist, breast care nurse or GP.
Your exercises

Gentle mobilising exercises with drains in place:

During this time you should avoid:

- Excessive reaching above your head
- Excessive reaching out to the side of your body
- Any vigorous activities such as carrying heavy items, pushing or pulling with your operated arm.

Exercise one

- Start with your shoulders relaxed.
- Shrug your shoulder up towards your ears.
- Lower them slowly.
- Return to your starting position.

Repeat 5 times
Exercise two

- Place your hand on your shoulder.
- Straighten your arm out and bend it again keeping your arm below shoulder height.

Position 1

![Position 1 Image]

Position 2

![Position 2 Image]

Repeat 5 times
Exercise three

- Place your hand on your shoulder.
- Straighten your arm out to the side and bend your elbow again.

Position 1

Position 2

Repeat 5 times
Once drains are out:

Exercise 4

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

Position 1

![Position 1 Image]

Position 2

![Position 2 Image]

Repeat 5 times
Exercise five

- Place your arm by your side with your elbow straight.
- Raise your arm out to the side away from your body, leading with your thumb, and continue up towards your head.
- Slowly bring your arm back down again.

Position 1

Position 2

Repeat 5 times
Exercise six

- Place your hand behind your neck.
- Keep your head up, push your elbow out to the side and then back to the middle.

Repeat 5 times

Exercise seven

- Take your hand behind your back, reaching up as far as possible between your shoulder blades.

Repeat 5 times
**General points**
Following breast surgery you may experience changes in sensation over your breast, your chest or inner arm. You may experience numbness, tightness, tingling, or extra sensitivity to touch. These sensations are quite normal.

Gentle stroking or tapping of your inner arm may ease the discomfort, however you may be left with some residual numbness.

Another common symptom is ‘cording’. This is hardening of the lymphatic vessels in the armpit and you might feel or see a tight cord running down part of your arm. This is resolved by continuing your regular exercises and stretching of your arm. If this symptom persists contact your health professional.

Be aware of lifting heavy objects with your affected arm. Listen to your body and stop if it’s too heavy and it causes you discomfort or strain.

**Massage**
Once the wound is fully healed and dry you can use a non-perfumed cream such as aqueous cream and massage above and below the scar in gentle circular movements with your finger tips. It is sometimes helpful to get someone to do this for you.

If at anytime you experience localised redness, heat or swelling around the wound, arm pit or arm then you should contact your breast care nurse as soon as possible.

**Lymphoedema**
The tissues in the body are surrounded by a colourless fluid containing mainly water and protein. This fluid is known as lymph and provides nourishment to the tissues. Most of the fluid is drained away by the veins but the excess lymph fluid is drained by lymphatic vessels and filtered by lymph nodes before returning into the blood stream. This system is known as the lymphatic system.

If the lymphatic system is impaired through removal of lymph node(s), or disease then excess fluid can build up and cause swelling of the arm and or breast. This is known as lymphoedema.
For further information about lymphoedema please refer to the ‘lymphoedema prevention booklet’ which you can obtain from your physiotherapist or breast care nurse.

**Advice on using your arm after your breast surgery**

**Sport and leisure**
If you have good shoulder movement and your operation scar has healed (usually 4-6 week post-op), you may begin swimming or keep fit. For specific advice please see your health professional.

**Driving**
Do not commence driving until your drains are out and you feel confident that you are safe and able to react in an emergency. We recommend you talk to your insurance company and also to your breast care nurse or consultant for more guidance.

**Some useful people and phone numbers to contact if you need help:**

Physiotherapist Name ..............................................................

Tel. No:- ..............................................................................

Breast Care Nurse Name ........................................................

Tel. No:- ..............................................................................

This leaflet was written by health professionals of the South East Wales breast surgery rehabilitation group. It is reviewed and updated every 2 years.