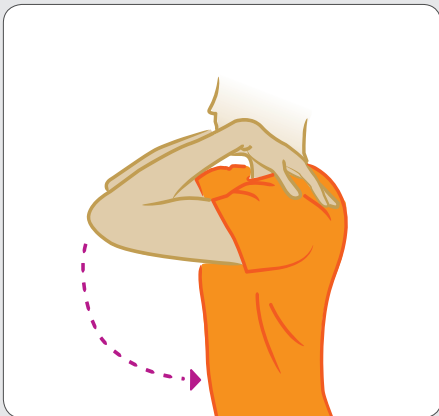
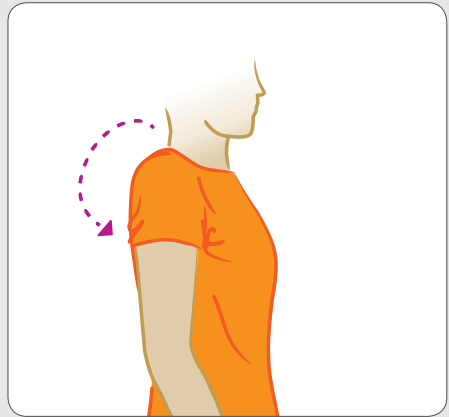


# Exercises

after breast cancer surgery



**This information is by Breast Cancer Care.**

**We are the only specialist UK-wide charity that supports people affected by breast cancer. We've been supporting them, their family and friends and campaigning on their behalf since 1973.**

Today, we continue to offer reliable information and personal support, over the phone and online, from nurses and people who've been there. We also offer local support across the UK.

From the moment you notice something isn't right, through to treatment and beyond, we're here to help you feel more in control.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **[breastcancercare.org.uk](https://breastcancercare.org.uk)**

The logo for Breast Cancer Care, featuring the words "breast", "cancer", and "care" stacked vertically. "breast" and "cancer" are in a pink color, and "care" is in an orange color. The font is a bold, sans-serif typeface.

**breast  
cancer  
care**

# Why do I need to do exercises after my breast surgery?

These exercises can help you regain arm and shoulder movement after surgery for breast cancer.

Muscles seize up very quickly if they're not used, so it's important to do these exercises as part of your daily routine.

The exercises can also help:

- improve symptoms that may be caused by tight scars and cording, when you feel as if you have a tight cord running down your affected arm
- prevent long-term problems with arm and shoulder movement, posture and stiffness
- reduce the risk of lymphoedema – swelling of the arm, hand, breast or chest area caused by a build-up of lymph fluid

If you're worried about any of these, or have symptoms of cording, speak to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist as soon as possible.

The exercises have been developed with the help of breast surgeons, breast care nurses and physiotherapists.

## Who are the exercises suitable for?

The exercises are suitable for people who have had:

- breast surgery
- lymph node removal
- radiotherapy

If you've recently had a breast reconstruction or any other type of surgery, talk to the surgeon who did the operation, your breast care nurse or your physiotherapist before you start any exercises, and follow their advice.

## When to start the exercises

Ideally, start the exercises the day after your surgery.

If you feel you're unable to start the exercises within a couple of days of your surgery, speak to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist.

Don't worry if you can't manage to do all the exercises every time. For example, during radiotherapy you may find the exercises more difficult. Do as much as you feel you can.

## How should the exercises feel?

You shouldn't feel pain when doing the exercises. However, a stretching or pulling sensation is normal.

You may be advised to take some pain relief before doing the exercises.

The more you do the exercises, the easier they should become.

Always do the warm-up at the start and the cool-down at the end of each session to help avoid injury and prevent stiffness.

If at any time you become concerned about your range of movement or level of discomfort, speak to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist.

## When to stop

Stop doing the exercises and speak to your surgeon, physiotherapist or breast care nurse as soon as possible if you have:

- a seroma (a collection of fluid under the arm or in the breast or chest wall)
- wound infection or healing problems
- pain that gets worse during these exercises, or continues once you've finished them

Start the exercises again when your surgeon, physiotherapist or breast care nurse says it's safe to do so.

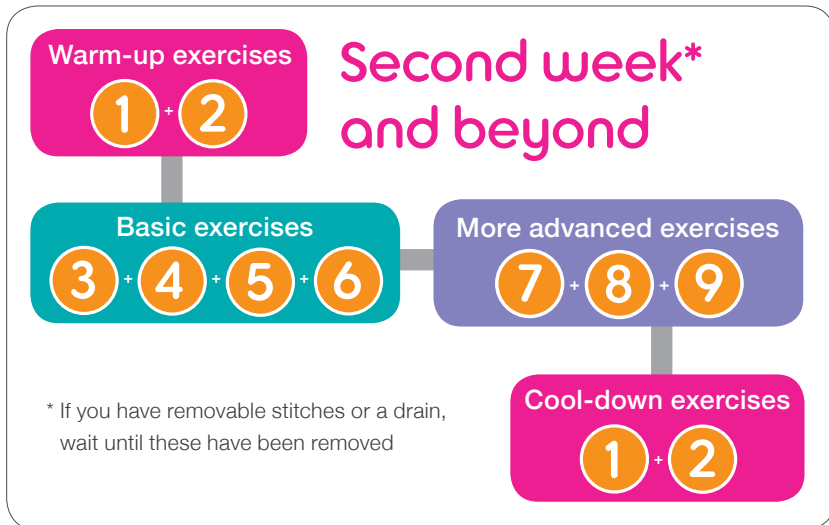
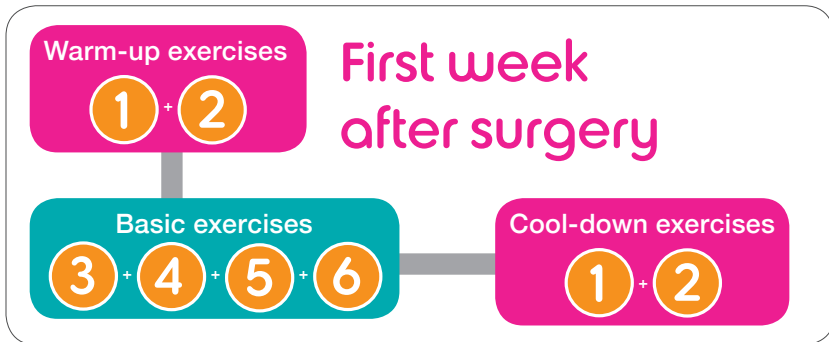
## How long should I continue doing the exercises?

If you've just had surgery, keep doing the exercises until you've got back the range of movement you had before your operation. Continue doing the exercises if you're going to have radiotherapy as they will help your shoulder flexibility.

If you've had radiotherapy, it's a good idea to do the exercises for as long as you're still feeling tightness and stiffness. Arm stiffness and weakness can occur long after surgery and radiotherapy so you may want to continue doing the exercises after this.

Talk to your breast care nurse or physiotherapist if you're not sure how long to keep up the exercise programme or if you have any concerns about your recovery after surgery.

# When to do the exercises



- Repeat each exercise 5 times before moving on to the next one
- Try to do the exercises 3 times a day – morning, around midday and evening

# Warm-up and cool-down

Read the information on the other side of the leaflet before you start, especially the section called 'When to stop'.

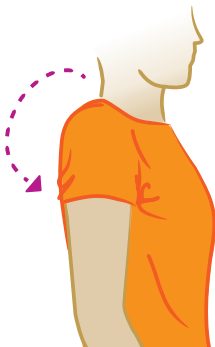
## 1 Shoulder shrugs

- Keep your arms loose and relaxed by your sides.
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and lower gently back down.



## 2 Shoulder circling

- Keep your arms loose and relaxed by your sides.
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, then circle them back and down.



## Basic exercises

You can do these exercises sitting down or standing up.

During the first week after surgery, do not raise your arms above shoulder level (90 degrees) when doing these exercises.

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### Bent arm forwards

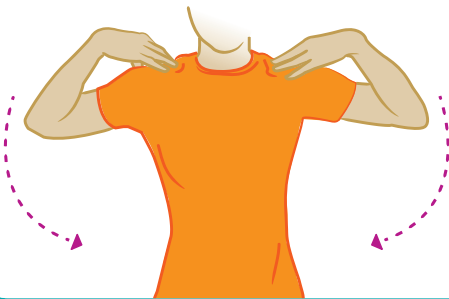
- Bend your elbows and rest your hands lightly on your shoulders.
- Raise both your arms forward so they are at right angles to your body.
- Lower your elbows slowly.



4

### Bent arm sideways

- Rest your hands on your shoulders, but this time raise your elbows out to the sides.
- Lower your elbows slowly.





# 5

## Back scratching

- Hold your arms out to the sides and bend your arms from the elbow.
- Slowly reach up behind your back to just under your shoulder blades.
- Slowly lower your arms back down to your sides



# 6

## Winging it

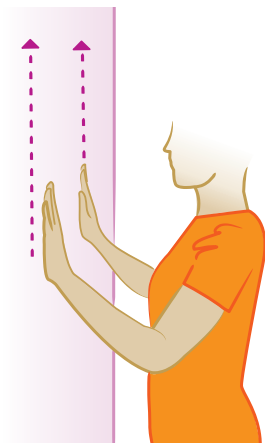
- Place your hands behind your head with your elbows pointing forwards.
- Bring your elbows back so they're pointing out to the sides, then return to the starting position.



## More advanced exercises

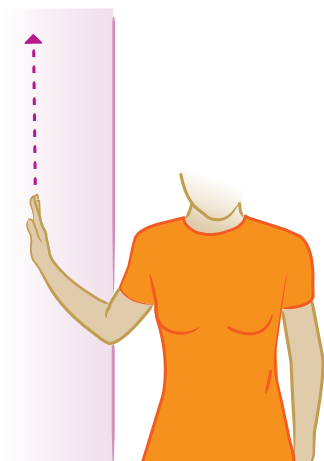
7

### Wall climbing



#### Step one

- With your feet apart, stand close to and facing a wall. Put both hands on the wall at shoulder level.
- Looking straight ahead, gradually work your hands up the wall – sliding them or using your fingers to climb. Get as far as you can, to feel a stretch but not pain.
- Hold here and count to 10.
- Slide your hands back to shoulder level before repeating the exercise.
- Try to get higher each time.



#### Step 2

- Stand sideways with your affected side nearest the wall.
- Put your hand on the wall, keeping your elbow bent and your shoulders relaxed.
- Look straight ahead and gradually creep your hand up the wall as far as you can, allowing your elbow to straighten.
- Hold here and count to 10, then lower your hand back down.

## 8

## Arm lifts

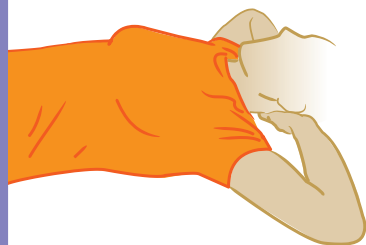
**Alternative**

If you have difficulty lying down – for example because of breathlessness – you can do this exercise in a sitting position, leaning back in your chair.

- Lie on the bed or floor with a cushion or pillow to support your head.
- Take three or four really deep breaths and concentrate on relaxing your shoulders so they are not hunched up towards your ears.
- Clasp your hands together or hold onto a stick or broom handle. Keep your elbows straight and lift your arms up and over your head as far as you feel comfortable.
- Hold them here and count to 10, then lower your arms slowly. You may find it useful to put a pillow behind you to support your arms until you're able to get them further back.

## 9

## Elbow push



- Lie on your back with your hands behind your head and your elbows out to the sides.
- Gently push your elbows downwards into the bed or floor as far as is comfortable.
- Hold and count to 10, then relax.

# About this leaflet

**Exercises after breast cancer surgery** was written by Breast Cancer Care's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:

Phone **0345 092 0808**

Email **[publications@breastcancercare.org.uk](mailto:publications@breastcancercare.org.uk)**



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Breast Cancer Care and Breast Cancer Now are uniting to create one charity for everyone affected by breast cancer. Our aim is that by 2050, everyone who develops breast cancer will live and be supported to live well.

From research to care, our new charity will have people affected by breast cancer at its heart - providing support for today and hope for the future. We'll find ways to prevent the disease, improve early diagnosis, develop new treatments, campaign for better care, and support people with the physical and emotional impact of breast cancer.

For breast cancer care, support and information, call us free on **0808 800 6000** or visit **[breastcancercare.org.uk](https://breastcancercare.org.uk)**

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