Exercises After Breast Surgery
What activities can I do?
- Walking is a great way to get active after your surgery. It helps you keep your lungs and heart healthy. It is also a great way to relieve stress, control weight gain and combat fatigue.

Remember it takes time to recover. Start slowly. Gradually increase your speed and the length of time you walk.

During your walks, you should be able to carry on a conversation. If you cannot, you should slow down.
- Use your surgical side arm for normal daily activities such as brushing your teeth/hair and washing yourself.
- It is safe to do light housework after surgery, but don’t lift anything heavier than about 5kg (10lbs) for the first 4 weeks. Do short periods at a time and rest in between.

Let pain be your guide, a little discomfort is okay but more pain means you are doing too much.

Posture
- Try to focus on standing and sitting tall with your shoulders back.
- Try not to slouch, roll your shoulders forward or poke your chin outward.

What exercises should I do?
Exercise is an important part of recovery after surgery.

It helps you:
- Get back full movement in your arms and shoulders.
- Reduce stiffness, swelling and pain.
- Improve your overall wellbeing.
- Get back to the normal activities you do every day as soon as possible.

General tips for arm exercises
Do 10 repetitions of each exercise, 3–5 times a day
- Do the exercises until you feel a gentle stretch.
- Do not make any quick jerky moves or push into pain.
- Breathe deeply and often as you do each exercise.
- It is normal to have some discomfort with exercise but if you have a significant increase in pain or swelling contact your doctor.

Some people feel some numbness and tingling around their surgery site(s). The exercises we give you should help with this. Sometimes gentle rubbing or stroking the area with your hand or a soft cloth after it has fully healed can also help make it feel better.
Exercises to begin the day after surgery
Do 10 repetitions of each exercise, 3–5 times a day

1. Hand pumps and elbow bends
   a) Make a fist and then stretch fingers straight.
   b) Bend and straighten your elbow (biceps curl).

2. Shoulder shrugs
   Shrug shoulders up to your ears. Relax and let them down. Breathe in when you lift and breathe out when you lower.

3. Shoulder circles
   Roll shoulders backwards. Repeat, rolling shoulders forward.

4. Neck stretch
   Tilt head to one shoulder to stretch opposite side of neck and hold for 5–10 seconds. Repeat to opposite side.

5. Shoulder blade squeeze
   Sit or stand with your arms by your sides and your palms facing your sides. Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together and down. Hold for 5–10 seconds then relax and return to the start position.

6. Arm lifts
   Clasp hands and raise arms overhead, keeping elbows straight. Lower slowly. Begin in lying position and progress to sitting.
Exercises to add in at Week 2
Do 10 repetitions of each exercise, 3–5 times a day

7. Winging it
   Lie on your back with your hands behind your head and your elbows pointed to the ceiling. Move elbows apart and down to the bed, hold 2 seconds and then bring them back up to starting position.

8. Wall walking
   a) Facing a wall, “walk” fingers up the wall as far as you can. “Walk” back down. (Both arms)
   b) Stand sideways to a wall, and “walk” fingers up as far as you. “Walk” back down. (Affected arm)

9. Snow angels
   Lie on your back with your arms at your sides and elbows straight. Move your arms out and over your head and then back to your sides.

How long do I need to do these exercises for?
Continue these exercises until both arms are moving equally easily. This may take 2–3 months.

From 6 weeks onwards
As you feel stronger you can gradually start increasing your physical activity and strengthening exercises. It is important to build up slowly. You may want to consult your doctor or physiotherapists to help you plan a suitable program.

Physical activity (eg walk, bike, swim, aerobics and yoga)
There isn’t one activity or sport that is better than another. What is important is keeping active. Find what you enjoy and make a plan to allow you to gradually get into or go back to the activity.
Aim for 150 minutes of aerobic activity a week.
Physical activity will help you maintain a healthy body weight and prevents many chronic diseases. It will also keep your arm strong and moving well and will help you control swelling in the arm.

Strengthening
Some ways to keep building strength:
- Slowly getting back to household chores, gardening or yard work.
- Exercises with light weights (1-2 lbs), if you don’t have weights you can use unopened soup cans or filled water bottles.
Resources to help with ongoing activity and strengthening

“Exercise for Health”
An Exercise Guide for Breast Cancer Survivors

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http://www.bcphysio.org/

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