

Exercises Following Axillary Dissection

Patient information

Being physically active and exercising regularly is important for your physical health, your emotional wellbeing and your quality of life. Try to be active most days of the week – every day if you can manage. In the beginning, start slowly and listen to your body.

It is important to be mindful of your surgical site and move within the recommendations of your healthcare team. The aim is to reap the benefits of exercise without incurring injury.

It is natural for your skin and muscles to feel tight after surgery. Gradual introduction to specific exercises will help prevent stiffness and will improve your movement.

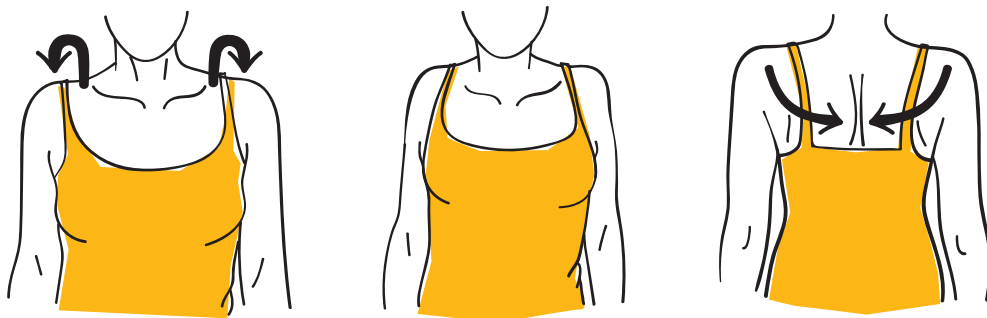
These exercises are designed so that you can perform them at home. The frequency and duration of the exercises are individualised for you by your physiotherapist, and this decision will be made based on the extent of your surgery, possible complications and your fitness level. All movements should be performed within your comfort levels. This is to ensure that you do not place unnecessary tension on your new surgical incision site and increase leakage from your wound or drain site. If you experience strong pain, cease the exercises and notify your health care professional at your next appointment.

Early exercises while you are in hospital

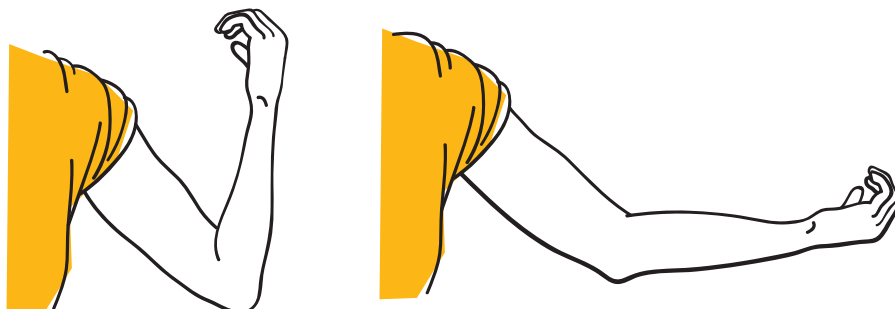
You will have some drains exiting from the side of your chest near the armpit after your surgery. You may find these drains restrict your arm movement initially, especially above your shoulder level. Please take care to move within your limits of discomfort. Elbow and hand movements are unrestricted. Exercises can be performed for 10-20 repetitions, 3-4 times per day.

1. Shoulder circles

Slowly lift shoulders up, back and down in a circle, gently opening chest.



2. Elbow bend and straighten



3. Fist open and close



If you are unsure about your exercises, please ask to speak to a physiotherapist or your treating health professional.

Exercises when you are home

You may still have the drains in place when you go home from hospital. Take care to slowly increase the frequency and intensity of exercise until the drains are removed. Exercises can be performed for 10-20 repetitions 3-4 times per day.

4. Arm lift

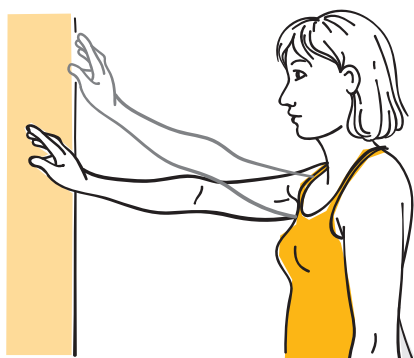
Lying on your back with your knees bent, hold onto a long stick or clasp your hands together.

Use your unaffected arm to assist your affected arm to lift up in an arc to shoulder height or beyond. The movement range will depend on the limits posed by your drain and your level of comfort. Once the drains are removed, aim to take your arms all the way back to the pillow. You should feel a stretch under the armpit.



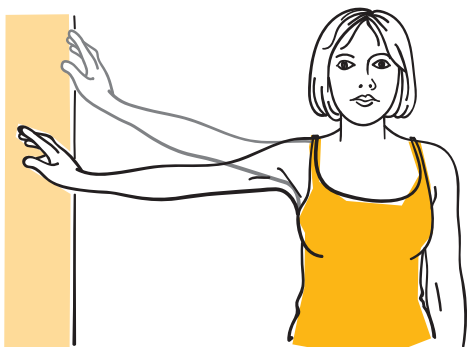
5. Walk fingers up the wall (facing wall)

Walk your fingers slowly up the wall. Aim for full range of movement once the drains are removed, otherwise, take your fingers as high as your drains permit. Relax your shoulders, then slowly walk your fingers down. You should feel a stretch under the armpit. Do not arch your lower back.



6. Walk fingers up the wall (to side)

Walk your fingers slowly up the wall. Aim for full range of movement once the drains are removed, otherwise, take your fingers as high as your drains permit. Relax your shoulders, then slowly walk your fingers down. You should feel a stretch under the armpit. Do not arch your lower back.



Advanced exercises (after drains have been removed)

The exercises should be slowly progressed to an advanced level once your drains have been removed. It is expected that you will regain normal shoulder movement within 4–6 weeks after removal of drains. You may still feel stiff in your movement so these exercises may need to be continued. Please note these exercises are to be used as a guide only. Aim for 3×10 seconds of gentle stretch, 3 times per day.

7. Shoulder rotation

Lie on back with knees bent (as in Exercise 4). Place hands behind head and gently allow your elbows to drop towards the bed, stretching your chest and armpits.



8. Armpit stretches

Similar to those exercises in 5 and 6 but seated in front of a desk, lean forward and walk your fingers forward towards the end of your range. You can also vary the angle of pull in the armpit by changing your hand position on the desk.



Strengthening exercises may also be appropriate once full range has been achieved. Please speak to your physiotherapist or health professional for further progression of exercises.

Your referrer's details:

Please note: The information in this brochure is of a general nature and should not replace the advice of healthcare professionals. All care has been taken to ensure the information presented here is accurate at the time of publishing (June 2021).