

Exercises Following Neck 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.

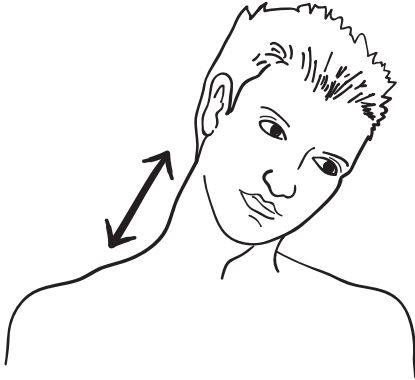
It is natural for your skin and muscles to feel tight after surgery. Gradual introduction to specific exercises will help prevent stiffness and will improve your movement.

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 (when drains are still in)

1. Head tilt

Sitting down, look straight ahead and tilt your head towards one side until a mild pull is felt in the opposite side of your neck, gently stretching the affected area. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day.



2. Deep neck flexor strengthening

Sitting down, look straight ahead and gently draw your head back pretending you are holding a ripe peach under your chin. Do not tip head forwards. Keep neck and back straight. Hold end position for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times, 3 times per day. This exercise can also be performed lying down on your back with head supported.



3. Drawing down bottom lip

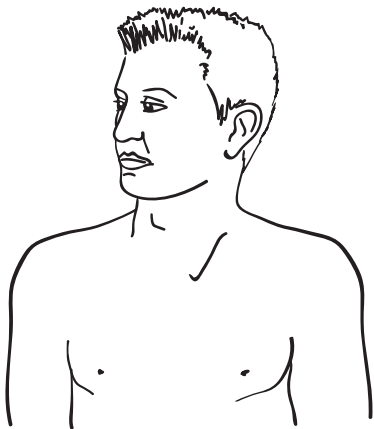
Do this in front of a mirror. Show your bottom teeth. Turn the bottom corners of your mouth down by using the muscles underneath your lower lip. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day. Do not be concerned if there is asymmetry present. This usually improves with time.



Exercises after drains have been removed

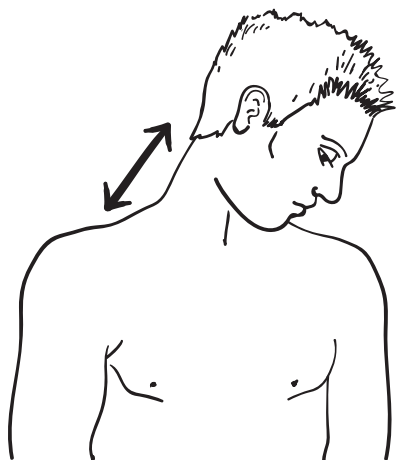
4. Neck rotation

Sitting down, keeping your back straight and facing the front, turn your head to one side as far as you can comfortably go. You can also perform this exercise lying down with your head supported. Repeat for both sides. Repeat 5 times each side, 3 times per day.



5. Neck stretch looking down

Sitting down, keeping your back straight and facing forwards, look down towards your armpit on the opposite side to your surgery. You should feel a gentle stretch in your affected neck area. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times, 3 times per day.



6. Neck extension

Sitting down, keeping your back straight and facing the front, support the back of your head with your hands and look up. You should feel a stretch at the front of your neck. Repeat 5 times, 3 times per day.

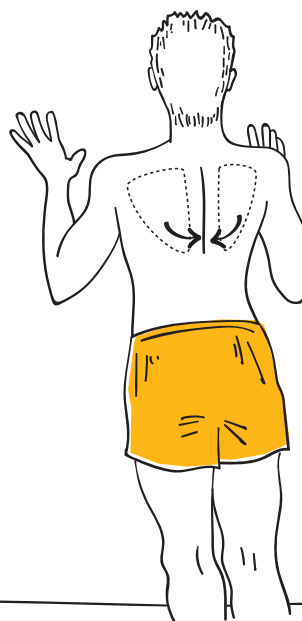
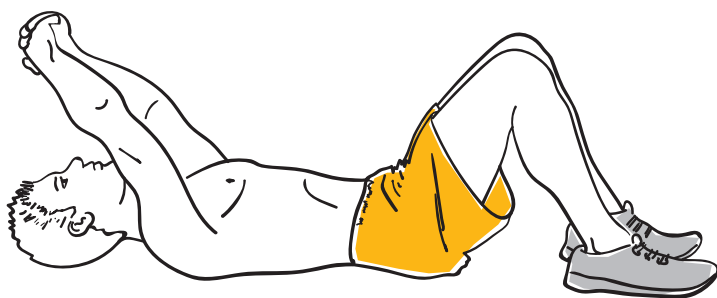


If you are unsure about your exercises, please ask to speak to a physiotherapist or your treating health professional. You may need to discontinue or reduce these exercises if the skin on your neck becomes fragile during radiotherapy.

If you are having trouble with lifting your arm up after your operation, speak with your physiotherapist, who will modify these exercises to suit your needs.

7. Arm lift

Lying on your back and keeping your shoulder blades in contact with the bed, raise your arm up and back towards your head. You can use your other hand to support the arm on your affected side, if necessary. Repeat 5–10 times, 3 times per day.



8. Wall push-ups

Standing up, place your hands up against the wall at around shoulder level. Feet should be shoulder width apart and about half a metre away from the wall. Keeping your back straight, push up against the wall gently drawing shoulder blades downwards and together. Do not arch your back. Repeat 10 times, 3 times per day.

Additional exercises may also be appropriate if there is a specific muscle or nerve problem. 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 (July 2021).