Arm Exercise Program

This information describes an arm exercise program that will help you with your recovery.

Doing arm exercises with gentle movements will help prevent stiffness. It will also help you move better and get back your strength and endurance.

The arm exercises below will help you work on a few different muscle groups. If you have weakness in one arm, you can change the exercises as described in the instructions. Your occupational or physical therapist may change the exercises to meet your needs.

Exercise Tips

- Dress comfortably. Your clothes shouldn’t limit your movements. Wear a hospital gown, pajamas, or athletic clothing.
- Do the movements slowly.
- Don’t hold your breath while doing any of these exercises. Breathe deeply. It might be helpful to count out loud during the exercises to keep your breaths evenly paced and remind you to breathe.
- Do these exercises while lying in bed, sitting at the edge of your bed, sitting up straight in a chair, or standing. If you do them while sitting at the edge of your bed or standing, make sure another adult is around. This will help to make sure you’re safe and lower your risk of falling.
- If an exercise feels uncomfortable or painful, don’t do it. Tell your occupational or physical therapist which exercises are uncomfortable. Keep doing the other exercises that don’t hurt you.
- If you have any questions, talk with your physical therapist or occupational therapist.
Exercises

Shoulder shrugs

1. Move your shoulders up toward your ears, like a shrug (see Figure 1).
2. Drop them down (see Figure 2).

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

Shoulder squeezes

1. Move your shoulders backward, toward your back. Try to squeeze your shoulder blades together (see Figure 3).
2. Hold for _____ seconds.
3. Relax.

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

**Draw shoulders forward**

1. Move your shoulders forward, towards your chest (see Figure 4).
2. Hold for______ seconds.
3. Relax.

![Figure 4](image)

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

**Shoulder circles**

1. Roll your shoulders forward in a circle ______ times (see Figure 5).
2. Roll your shoulders backwards in a circle ______ times.
3. Relax.

![Figure 5](image)
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

**Sideways arm rotations**

1. With your arms at shoulder height, clasp your hands together in front of you.
2. Without moving your waist, move your arms to the left (see Figure 6).
3. Return your arms to the center.
4. Without moving your waist, move your arms to the right.
5. Return your arms to the center.

![Image of arm rotation exercise](image)

Figure 6.

Repeat _____ times.

Do this exercise _____ times per day.

**Shoulder raises and backward swings**

For both of these exercises, if one arm is weaker than the other, clasp your hands together and raise both of them over your head.

**Shoulder raise**

1. Start with your arms at your side.
2. With your palms facing each other, raise your arms in front of you as far as you can (see Figure 7).
3. Return to the starting position.
Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

**Backwards shoulder swing**

1. Start with your arms at your side.
2. With your palms facing each other, raise your arms behind you as far as you can (see Figure 8).
3. Return to the starting position.

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.
Sideways arm raises

1. Start with your arms relaxed at your sides (see Figure 9).
2. Slowly raise your arms sideways as far as you can. If you can, try to raise them above your head.
3. Return to the starting position.

![Figure 9.](image)

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

If one arm is weaker than the other, have someone help you with your weaker arm.

Back climb

1. Place your hands behind your back. Use 1 hand to grasp your other wrist (see Figure 10).
2. Slowly slide your hands up the center of your back as far as you can.
3. Hold for _______ seconds.
4. Return to the starting position.
If one arm is weaker than the other, use your stronger arm to help your weaker arm slide up your back.

**Shoulder wings**

1. Start by slowly raising your hands over your head (see Figure 11, left) until you reach the back of your neck (see Figure 11, center).
2. Spread your elbows as far apart as possible (see Figure 11, right)
3. Hold for _______ seconds.
4. Return to the starting position.
Elbow bends

1. Start with your arms at your sides, with your palms facing forward (see Figure 12).
2. Bend your arm at your elbow until your palm touches your shoulder (see Figure 13).
3. Return to the starting position.
4. Repeat _____ times.
5. Repeat the exercise with your other arm.

Do this exercise _____ times per day.
If one arm is weaker than the other, use your stronger hand to clasp the wrist of your weaker hand and bend your elbows.

Forearm rotations

1. Rest your forearms on your lap with your palms facing down.
2. Turn your palms up toward the ceiling (see Figure 14).
3. Return to the starting position with your palms facing down (see Figure 15).
Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

If one arm is weaker than the other, clasp the wrist of your weaker arm. Rotate your forearm turning your palms up and down.

**Wrist bends**

1. Place your arms on a supported surface such as a table or desk, leaving your wrists free to move.

2. Turn your palms up toward the ceiling and bend your wrists up and down (see Figure 16).
Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

If one arm is weaker than the other, use your stronger hand to clasp the weaker wrist. Bend it up and down.

**Side wrist bends**

1. Place your forearms on a surface such as a table or your lap.
2. Without moving your elbow or forearm, move your wrists side to side (see Figure 17).

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

If one arm is weaker than the other, use your stronger hand to help the weaker hand. Bend your wrist side to side.
Finger bends

1. Place your forearms on a surface such as a table or your lap.

2. Make a tight fist, and then open your hand and extend your fingers out until they are straight (see Figure 18).

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

If one arm is weaker than the other, use your stronger hand to bend and straighten the fingers of the weaker hand.

Finger stretch

1. Place your forearms on a surface such as a table or your lap.

2. Slowly spread your fingers apart, then bring them back together (see Figure 19).
Repeat ____ times.
Do this exercise ____ times per day.

**Finger opposition**
Touch each fingertip to your thumb (see Figure 20).

Repeat ____ times.
Do this exercise ____ times per day.

**Pendulum exercise**

1. Lean over a table and support yourself with your stronger arm. Let your weaker arm hang down freely.

2. Swing your weaker arm in clockwise and counterclockwise circles and forward and back (see Figure 21). Let gravity help your arm with the motion.
Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.
Cane exercise

1. Lie on your back with your arms at your side, holding a cane or stick.
2. Lift the cane up toward the ceiling and over your head, keeping both arms level with each other (see Figure 22).
3. Return your arms to the starting position.

Figure 22.

Repeat _____ times.
Do this exercise _____ times per day.

Contact Information

You can reach your occupational or physical therapist at ________________.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.