



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Exercises After Your Mastectomy

This information describes the exercises you'll do after your mastectomy (breast surgery).

Deep Breathing Exercise

Deep breathing can help you relax and ease discomfort and tightness around your incision (surgical cut). It's also a good way to relieve stress during the day.

1. Sit comfortably in a chair.
2. Take a slow, deep breath through your nose. Let your chest and belly expand.
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth.

Repeat as many times as needed.

Arm and Shoulder Exercises

Doing arm and shoulder exercises will help you get back your full range of motion on your affected side. Your affected side is the side where you had your surgery. Your range of motion is how much you can safely move a part of your body. With full range of motion, you'll be able to:

- Move your arm over your head and out to the side
- Move your arm behind your neck
- Move your arm to the middle of your back

The way that you do arm and shoulder exercises and when you start doing them depends on the exact surgery you had. A member of your care team will give you the right handout based on your surgery. You can also use the table below.

| Procedure(s) done during your mastectomy | Instructions to follow |
|---|--|
| None (mastectomy only) | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy Without Immediate Lymphatic Reconstruction (ILR) or Breast Reconstruction</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_no_ilr_reconstruction) |
| Immediate lymphatic reconstruction (ILR) | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy With Immediate Lymphatic Reconstruction (ILR)</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_ilr) |
| Breast reconstruction using a tissue expander | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy With Breast Reconstruction Using a Tissue Expander</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_tissue_expander) |
| Breast reconstruction using tissue transfer | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy With Breast Reconstruction Using Tissue Transfer</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_tissue_transfer) |
| Immediate lymphatic reconstruction (ILR) and breast reconstruction using a tissue expander | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy With Immediate Lymphatic Reconstruction (ILR) and Breast Reconstruction Using a Tissue Expander</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_ilr_tissue_expander) |
| Immediate lymphatic reconstruction (ILR) and breast reconstruction using tissue transfer | <i>Exercises After Your Mastectomy With Breast Reconstruction Using Tissue Transfer</i> (www.mskcc.org/pe/exercises_mastectomy_tissue_transfer) |



If you have any questions about what exercises to do or how to do them, ask a member of your care team.

Scar Massage

You may feel uncomfortable touching your skin in the area of your scar. It's very important to get comfortable moving your skin over this area. Moving your skin will help your blood flow and soften the tissue.

Don't start doing scar massage until your incision has fully healed and your nurse tells you it's safe. There should be no open wounds or scabbed areas. The area of the scar may be numb or extra sensitive at first. Both of these feelings are normal after surgery.

To massage your scar:

1. Place 2 or 3 fingers over your scar. Gently move your skin in all directions. Don't squeeze your breast tissue.
2. Pick up your fingers and move them 1 or 2 inches (2.5 to 5 centimeters) in each direction around your scar. Repeat the massage.

Do this massage once a day for 5 to 10 minutes.

Tips for Managing Swelling

After your surgery, you may have some swelling or puffiness in your hand or arm on your affected side. This is normal and usually goes away on its own.

If you notice swelling in your hand or arm, follow the tips below to help the swelling go away. Remember to stay within your range of motion restriction, if you have one.

- Raise your arm above the level of your heart and do hand pumps several times a day. Only do this if it's within your range of motion restriction.
 - To do hand pumps, slowly open and close your fist 10 times. This will help drain the fluid out of your arm.
 - Don't hold your arm straight up over your head for more than a few minutes. This can cause your arm muscles to get tired.

- Raise your arm to the side a few times a day for about 20 minutes at a time. To do this, sit or lie down on your back. Rest your arm on a few pillows next to you so it's raised above the level of your heart.
- If you're able to sleep on your unaffected side, you can place 1 or 2 pillows in front of you and rest your affected arm on them while you sleep.

If the swelling doesn't go down within 4 to 6 weeks, call your surgeon or nurse.

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.

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