Exercises After Your Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy or Lumpectomy

This information explains exercises you can do to regain your range of motion after your sentinel lymph node biopsy or lumpectomy.

You can do these exercises on the first day after your surgery, as long as your surgeon tells you it's safe.

Deep Breathing Exercise

Deep breathing can help you relax and ease discomfort and tightness around your incision (surgical cut). This is also a good exercise to help relieve tension.

To do this exercise, sit comfortably in a chair and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. Let your chest and belly expand. Now, breathe out slowly through your mouth. You can repeat this several times.

Shoulder Rolls

The shoulder roll is a good exercise to start off with since it provides a gentle stretch to your chest and shoulder muscles. Do this exercise at least once a day or as directed by your healthcare provider.

1. Stand or sit comfortably with your arms relaxed at your sides (see Figure 1).

2. In a circular motion, bring your shoulders forward, up, backward, and down 10 times. Try to make the circle as large as you can and get both of your shoulders to move at the same time.
If you have some tightness across your incision or chest, begin with small circles and increase the size as the tightness lessens. You may feel more tightness with the backward direction than the forward direction, which you’ll do next. This will get better with practice.

3. Now, switch directions and do 10 shoulder rolls in the forward direction. Bring your shoulders backward, up, forward, and down.

Reaching Up

Reaching up is an exercise that will stretch your chest and shoulder muscles and help you regain full range of motion. Do this exercise once a day.

1. Stand or sit comfortably with your arms relaxed at your sides.

2. Keeping your elbows straight, slowly bring both arms up at a diagonal until you can reach straight up (see Figure 2). Hold this position for 10 seconds.

   - If you have tightness across your incision or chest, bring your arms up only to the point where you feel a gentle and comfortable stretch. This will get better with practice and you will be able to reach higher as the tightness decreases.

If you have any questions, call your doctor 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.