

# Arm and Shoulder Exercises

*A guide for people who have had breast cancer surgery*

**Doing some simple exercises gradually improves the strength and range of movement in your arm and shoulder after breast cancer surgery. They can also ease tightness in the chest and shoulder as you heal.**

- These exercises should not cause you pain. They won't hurt the wound, and the increased circulation can help you heal.
- Try to do (or build up to) 10 of each exercise, 3 times a day. Start slowly, if you need to. Try to do each move smoothly and gently, don't rush.
- Only the *Wall crawl* exercise needs to be done standing up. All others can be done sitting in a chair or lying on a bed if that's most comfortable.
- You should be able to use your arm, up to shoulder height, for light activities from the day after your surgery. Sit your arm on a pillow when resting.

## LEVEL 1 EXERCISES

Start the day after surgery and continue for 7 days unless your doctor says otherwise.



## LEVEL 2 EXERCISES

Start 7 days after surgery, and after any drains are removed, unless your doctor says otherwise.

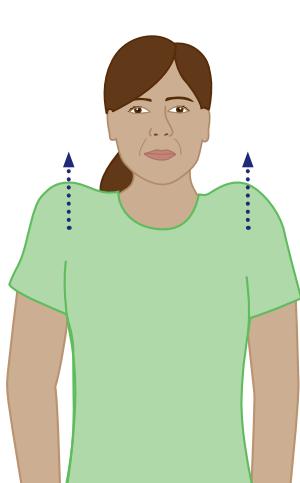
Tell your doctor or breast care nurse if you have pain or trouble doing these exercises. If you don't have pain-free, full movement for level 2 exercises a month after surgery, see a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist. The issue may be caused by something else (e.g. muscle tension, scarring, joint stiffness).

A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist can also help you develop an individual exercise program.

## LEVEL 1 EXERCISES

### Shoulder shrug

1. Start with your arms hanging loose by your sides if comfortable. If sitting, rest your hands on your legs.

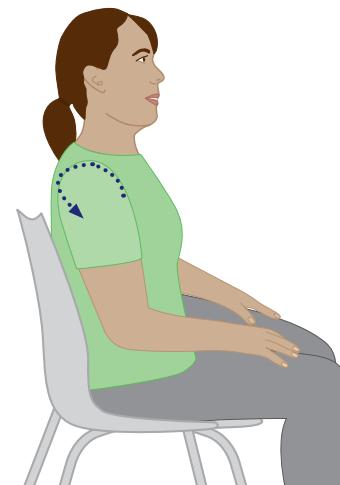


2. Slowly lift your shoulders up towards your ears.
3. Gently lower your shoulders back down and relax.

### Shoulder roll

1. Start with arms loose and elbows tucked gently by your sides. If sitting, rest your hands on your legs.

2. Slowly lift your shoulders up towards your ears like a shoulder shrug.
3. Gently roll your shoulders backwards and down in a circle to where you started.



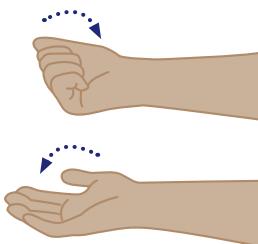
## LEVEL 1 EXERCISES

### Wrist moves

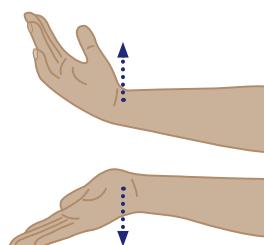
Exercise the arm or side that had surgery, or both sides together if both breasts are affected.

1. Start with your elbow resting gently at your side, with your arm bent and out in front of you. If you are sitting down, you can rest your arm on a pillow.

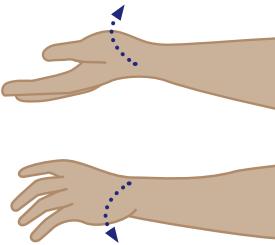
2. Close your hand to make a fist, and gently squeeze. Then relax.



3. With palms facing up, and hands relaxed, bend your wrist upwards and then downwards.



4. Gently twist your hand from the wrist – first with palm facing up, then with palm facing down.

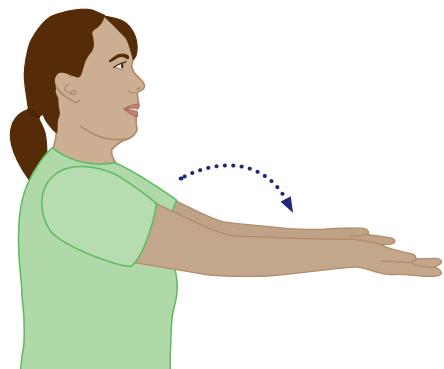
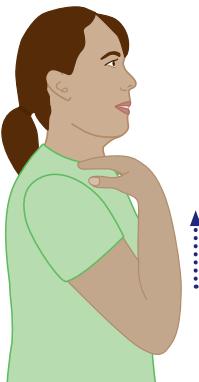


### Elbow stretch

1. Touch your hands to your shoulders on the same side, arms facing in front of you.

2. Extend your arms to the front and gently straighten your elbows.

3. Then return your hands back to the shoulders.

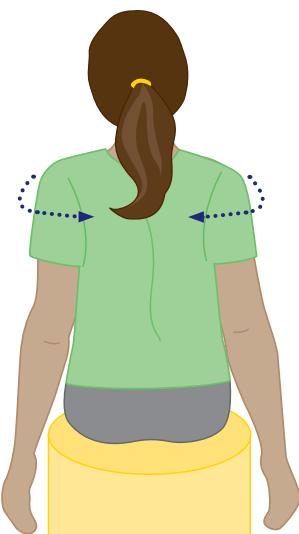


### Shoulder squeeze

1. Start with elbows resting by your sides. You can have arms straight by your side or bent at the elbow. If sitting you can also rest your hands on your legs.

2. Slowly and gently squeeze your shoulder blades back and together.

3. Hold for a second then gently relax.



### When to move on to other exercises

After completing level 1 and 2 exercises, talk to your doctor or a qualified physiotherapist about when it is safe for you to begin other types of exercise, such as cardio and strength-training. Once you have been told it's okay to move on from these arm and shoulder exercises, you may like a copy of Cancer Council's *Exercise for People Living with Cancer* booklet. It has more information about exercise for people affected by cancer and step-by-step instructions for moves to try at home.

► For a free copy, call 13 11 20 or visit your local Cancer Council website.



## LEVEL 2 EXERCISES

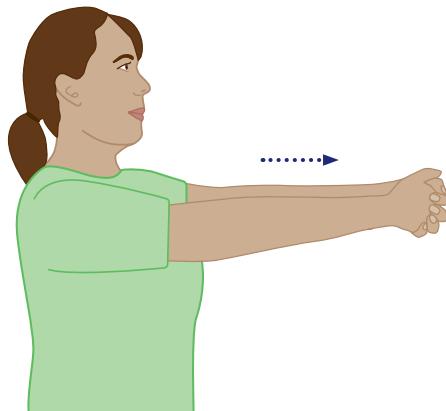
You can start these exercises 7 days after surgery, and after any drains have been removed.

### Arm stretch

1. Clasp your hands together in front of your chest, elbows by your side.



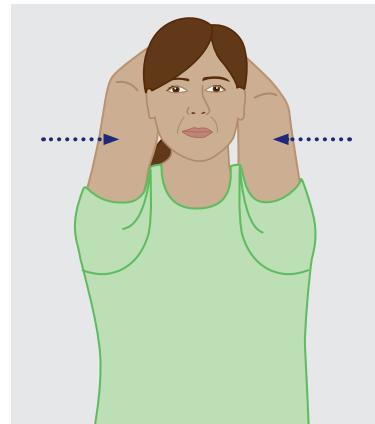
2. Stretch your arms out in front as far as you can, aiming for straight elbows.
3. Pull shoulder blades together as hands go back to the start.



### Elbows together

This exercise is best done lying down.

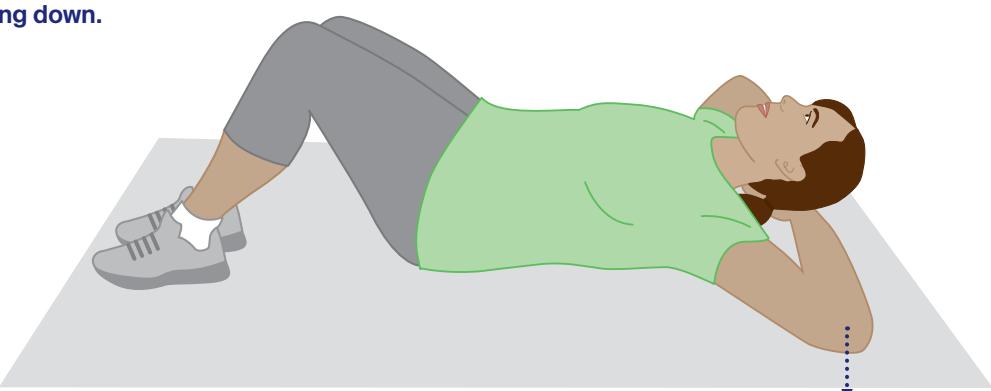
1. Put your hands together behind your head, with your elbows out to the side.
2. Bring your elbows together in front of you, keeping hands clasped together behind your head.
3. Gently return elbows back to the side. Keep hands together and move on to *Elbow push back* exercise.



### Elbow push back

This exercise is best done lying down.

1. Clasp your hands together behind your head, with elbows out to the side.
2. Gently stretch elbows backwards, pushing them gently downwards into the bed or floor and hold for up to 10 seconds.
3. Relax muscles completely and rest before repeating.

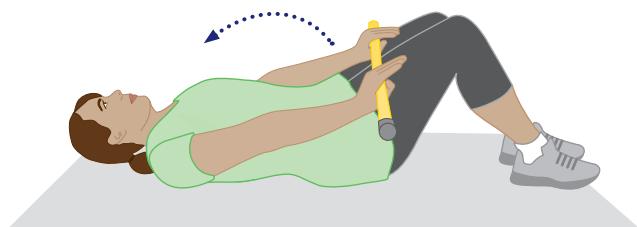


## LEVEL 2 EXERCISES

### Arm lift

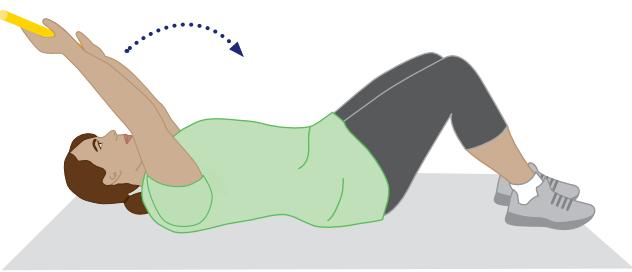
If you can't lie down, sit and lean back into the chair instead.

1. Lie down – with a pillow under your head if you like. Hold a stick, broom handle or ruler or just clasp hands together.



2. Relax your shoulders and avoid shrugging them towards your ears.

3. With straight arms, gently lift them to above your head – only as far as feels comfortable.

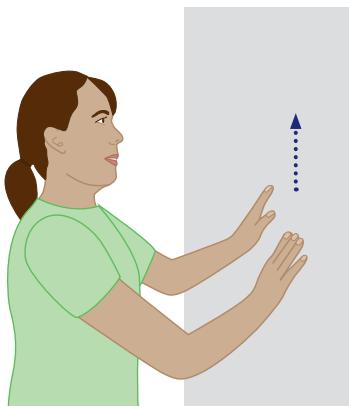


4. Gently return your arms back down to your hips and the starting position.

### Wall crawl

This exercise should be done standing up.

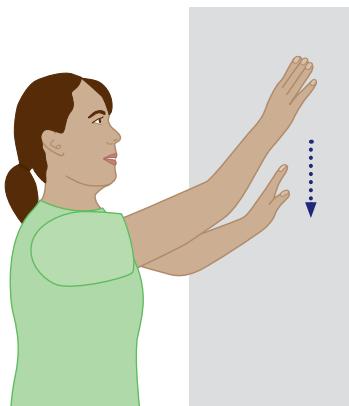
1. Stand facing a wall with feet shoulder-width apart. Move close to the wall (about 20 cm away). Put your hands flat onto the wall at about shoulder height, with fingers pointing up.



2. Use your fingers to walk up the wall (like a spider), or keep your hands flat and slide them upwards. Use your "good" arm to help move your surgery arm if you need to.

3. Go as high as feels comfortable – so you feel a stretch, but no pain. Try to hold for 10 seconds.

4. Gently slide or walk your hands back down to shoulder height and where you started.



#### Note to reader

Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This fact sheet is intended as a general introduction and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.

#### Acknowledgements

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Cancer Council SA *Breast cancer surgery: Information for women having breast cancer surgery* as source material. We thank the reviewers of this fact sheet: Jen McKenzie, Lymphoedema Physiotherapist, ESSA Accredited Exercise Physiologist, Director at The McKenzie Clinic, QLD; Sharon Dreise, Consumer; Prof Elisabeth Elder, Specialist Breast Surgeon, Westmead Breast Cancer Institute, University of Sydney, NSW; Eliza Macdonald, Accredited Exercise Physiologist, Sydney Cancer Survivorship Centre, Concord Repatriation General Hospital, NSW; Annmarie Mitchell, Consumer; Chris Rivett, 13 11 20 Consultant, Cancer Council SA. We would also like to thank the health professionals and consumers who have worked on previous versions of this information.

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Cancer Council acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

