

# Resources

## Common Exercises after Breast Surgery

Exercise can help your recovery after surgery. Below are some exercises that may be helpful. Check with your doctor before starting these. Your care team may have a more specific plan.

### Deep Breathing - Week 1

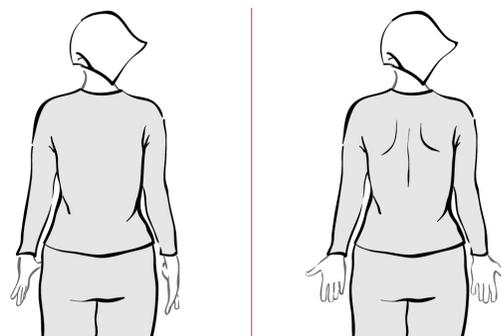
Deep breathing helps expand your chest wall. It also improves the flow of lymph fluid around the area where you had surgery. It helps you relax and can remind you to fill your lungs completely.

1. Lie on your back or sit in a chair and then take a slow, deep breath through your nose. Breathe in as much air as you can while trying to expand your chest and stomach like a balloon.
2. Keep your shoulders and neck relaxed.
3. Breathe out slowly and completely.
4. Repeat 4 or 5 times.

### Shoulder Blade Squeeze - Week 1

This exercise helps improve your posture and movement in your shoulder.

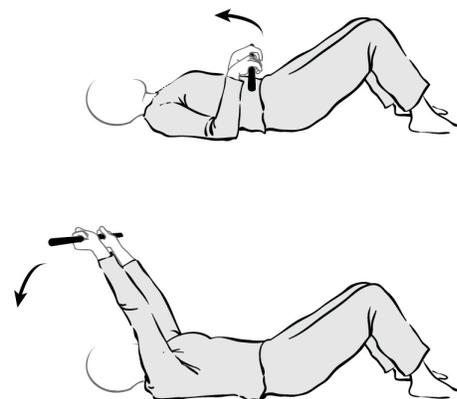
1. Sit in a chair facing straight ahead without resting your back on the chair, or stand up. Your arms should be at your sides with your elbows straight and your palms facing your sides.
2. Open your chest, gently squeeze your shoulder blades together and down and rotate your thumbs so your palms face forward.
3. Hold for 10 seconds and practice your deep breathing while holding this posture. Relax and return to the starting position.
4. Repeat 5 to 10 times in each direction.



### Wand Exercise - Week 2

This exercise helps improve the forward movement of your shoulder. You will need a "wand" to do this exercise - try a broom handle, stick or cane.

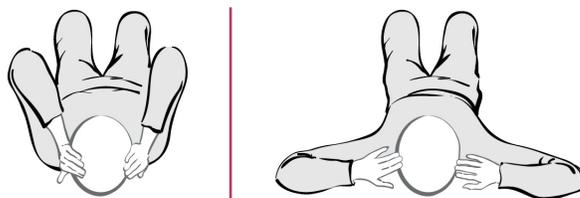
1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Hold the wand with your hands spaced as wide as your shoulders.
2. Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together.
3. Lift the wand over your head as far as you can until you feel a stretch, while keeping your arms straight. Your unaffected arm will help lift the wand.
4. Hold for 10 seconds, while you take 2 or 3 deep breaths. Slowly lower your arms back down.
5. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



Adapted from: Exercises after Breast Surgery. Canadian Cancer Society 2019.

## Winging It - Week 2

This exercise helps improve movement in the front of your chest and shoulder. It may take several weeks of regular exercise before your elbows get close to the floor. You may have some discomfort with this exercise because you are trying to regain the end of your range of movement (being able to move your arm up, down, forward and backward).



If it's too hard to move your elbows down, place a pillow behind your head and shoulders. As you progress and the exercise gets easier, you can remove the pillow.

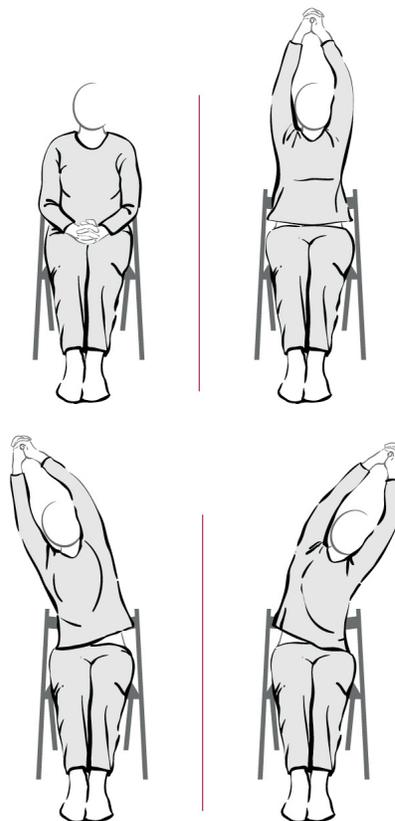
1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Touch your fingertips to your ears with your elbows pointed to the ceiling. (If you can't comfortably put your hands at your ears, place your fingers on your forehead, palms facing each other.)
2. Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together.
3. Move your elbows apart and down to the floor. Hold for 10 seconds.
4. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

\*If you have had surgery on both sides and start to feel pain while doing this exercise, it may be too much for you at first. Try doing one arm at a time instead.

## Side Bends - Week 2

Once you're getting better movement in your shoulder, try this more advanced stretching exercise. It helps improve movement in your shoulder and chest wall on both sides of your body. You can do this exercise once a day.

1. Sit in a chair and clasp your hands together in your lap.
2. Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together.
3. Slowly lift your arms over your head. Bend your elbows slightly.
4. When your arms are above your head, bend at your waist and move your body to the right. Hold for 10 seconds. Keep yourself firmly planted on the chair and use your right hand to gently pull your left arm a little farther to the right. Take a deep breath in and out.
5. Return to the center and then bend to the left, using your left hand to pull your right arm farther.
6. Repeat 5 to 10 times on each side.



### Achieving full movement of your arm

Continue to do side bends every day until both arms are equally strong and can move easily. This may take 2 to 3 months or a bit longer if you've had surgery on both sides. You should be able to reach across the top of your head and touch your opposite ear without feeling a stretch in your underarm.

## Walking - Anytime

Walking and keeping your body moving will help your recovery. Here are some tips to promote healthy movement.

- Let your arms swing by your side.
- Breathe naturally. Do not hold your breath.