



Physiotherapy advice for patients recovering from head and neck surgery

Information for patients
Physiotherapy



USEFUL CONTACTS

Ward 9 Physiotherapist

01236 712 136 – please leave a message

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Tracheostomy Care** 01236 713 019

**Melanie Rose, Macmillan Head and Neck Clinical Nurse
Specialist** 01236 713 019

Macmillan Cancer Support www.macmillan.org.uk

Speak Easy Cancer Support Group Lanarkshire
www.speakeasylaryngectomee.co.uk

National Association of Laryngectomee Clubs
www.laryngectomy.org.uk

WHAT IS PHYSIOTHERAPY?

Following your surgery you may feel a little stiff and certain movements may be more difficult. You may also need advice on how to keep your chest clear. Physiotherapy can help you get back to normal movement after your operation. This leaflet gives advice on the following

- ❖ Posture
- ❖ Chest clearance techniques
- ❖ General mobility (walking)
- ❖ Neck and shoulder exercises
- ❖ Donor-flap site information

As required a physiotherapist will visit you on the ward and speak with you regarding your recovery.

POSTURE

Good posture after your operation will help open up your airways and decrease any neck or shoulder pain.

When sitting or standing, keep your head up, and your shoulders and upper back pulled down.

Avoid slumping or rounding your shoulders.

If your arm on your operated side is weak, you can rest it on a pillow while sitting.

This will help to prevent strain on your neck or shoulder

CHEST CLEARANCE TECHNIQUES

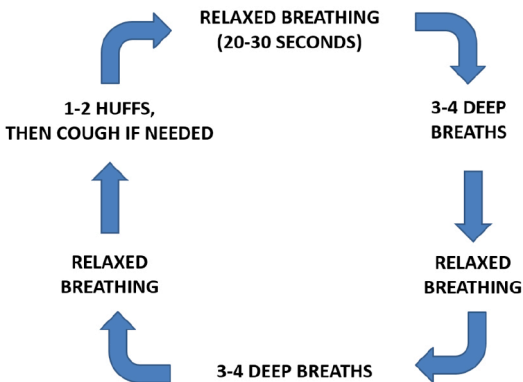
Phlegm is produced normally by the lungs as part of the body's natural clearing system. This clearing system can slow down and phlegm can build up after a general anaesthetic.

You may not be able to clear phlegm from your mouth, depending on the operation you've had. You may have an opening in your neck and will learn how to clear phlegm from here instead.

You should start the simple breathing exercises (called active cycle of breathing exercises) on the next page as soon as possible after your operation.

This will help to prevent strain on your neck or shoulder

Perform a 'huff' by imagining you are steaming up a mirror. Keep your mouth open, take a breath in, then quickly breathe out through your mouth (stoma).



You should aim to complete 2-3 cycles of these exercises every 2 hours at first, or until your chest feels clear.

If you are finding it difficult to clear your chest, a physiotherapist can help with this.

Nursing staff may use a small suction catheter to help you with clearing your chest at first, however you should still try these exercises as well.

GENERAL MOBILITY

Staff will let you know when it is safe for you to start mobilising after your operation.

It's important that you get out of bed and start moving around as soon as possible as this will help keep your chest clear and build up your strength.

Nursing staff can assist you with drips or drains that you may have in place.

Aim to gradually increase the distance you are walking until you are fully mobile again. You should aim to walk the length of the ward at least 3-4 times a day, if you can. If you are having difficulties with your mobility, nursing staff will ask the physiotherapist to come and see you.

NECK AND SHOULDER EXERCISES

The gentle exercises below can help with any pain or stiffness you may have. You should also follow any specific advice from your surgeon.

DAYS 1-7 You should concentrate on clearing your chest and moving around as normally as possible.

DAY 8 If you do not have a flap reconstruction. You can now start the exercises

DAY 14 If you do have a flap reconstruction, please start the exercises now



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NECK ROTATION

- ❖ Gently turn your head to the left
- ❖ Hold for 15 seconds
- ❖ Repeat this 5 times
- ❖ Repeat on your right side



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NECK SIDE STRETCH

- ❖ Gently tilt your head towards you left shoulder
- ❖ Hold for 15 seconds
- ❖ Repeat this 5 times
- ❖ Repeat on your right side



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SHOULDER SHRUGS

- ❖ Slowly move your shoulders up towards your ears
- ❖ Slowly lower your shoulders back down
- ❖ Repeat this 10 times



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SHOULDER ROLLS

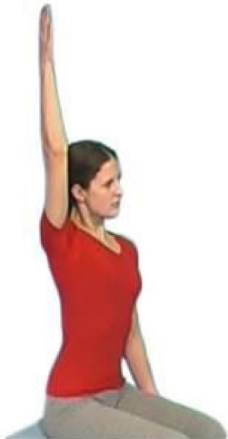
- ❖ Gently roll your shoulders forwards 10 times
- ❖ Gently roll your shoulders backwards 10 times



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SHOULDER SQUEEZES

- ❖ Squeeze your shoulder blades together and backwards
- ❖ Hold for 5-10 seconds
- ❖ Repeat this 5 times
- ❖ Repeat 5-10 times



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SHOULDER RAISE

- ❖ Bring your affected arm straight up in front of you with your palm facing inwards
- ❖ Return your arm to your side
- ❖ Repeat 5-10 times



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SIDEWAYS ARMS RAISE

- ❖ Slowly raise your affected arm sideways, helping the movement with your other hand
- ❖ Repeat 5-10 times



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BACK CLIMB

- ❖ Stand with your hands behind your back
- ❖ Push your affected hand up your back as far as you can
- ❖ Repeat 5-10 times



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SHOULDER WINGS

- ❖ Place your hands on the back of your neck
- ❖ Push your elbows back
- ❖ Hold for 10 seconds
- ❖ Repeat 5-10 times

- ❖ You may feel stiff and sore at first however, this should ease with movement
- ❖ Exercise gently and slowly, building up to repeating each exercise set three times per day
- ❖ It is a good idea to aim to do your exercises 30 minutes to one hour after taking painkillers
- ❖ If you are struggling with any exercise, please inform your physiotherapist

GENERAL MOBILITY

Your surgeon may need to use tissue from another area to reconstruct the area of tissue being removed. The reconstructed area is called a flap. The donor flap site is where the flap was taken from. Your physiotherapist will provide you with specific exercises to help you regain the movement you had at the donor flap site before surgery.

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Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

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www.nhsinform.co.uk
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