Exercises following neck dissection surgery

Information for patients
Therapy Services
What are the benefits of exercise following my surgery?

- The following exercises are designed to help prevent stiffness and discomfort and help you to regain the normal range of movement and strength of your neck and shoulders after surgery.

- Scar tissue formation is normal after surgery. Tightness can be reduced by regular gentle stretching.

When can I start my exercises?

- Most patients will have a drain in place for 2 - 3 days following neck dissection surgery to drain off any excess fluid. Your exercises can be started **when all your drains have been removed**.

- You may also have a doppler line in place following the surgery to monitor the blood supply to the site of the surgery. Your exercises can be started **when the doppler is removed**.

- It is safe to start your neck exercises when the stitches or clips in your neck are still in place.

- If you are unsure whether you should be starting your exercises please discuss this with your physiotherapist prior to commencing any of the following exercises.
How often should I complete these exercises?

- Aim to complete the exercises 3 - 5 times a day.
- The exercises should be done slowly and gently. Do not try to force the movement.
- The exercises should not be painful but it is normal to feel a stretching sensation.
- If you are having radiotherapy it is important to continue your exercises.

How can I help myself after I leave hospital?

- After any period of immobility due to injury, illness or an operation your exercise tolerance will be lower and you will be more at risk of circulatory problems.
- Try to remain as active and mobile as you can after discharge from hospital. This helps to maintain good circulation and joint and muscle health.
- Take adequate periods of rest through the day to aid recovery.
- Try not to do too much at once; break the activity up into smaller tasks.
- Progress your activity levels gradually as your recovery allows - little and often.
Post-operative neck dissection exercises

These exercises are to gently begin normal movement of your neck after your drains have been removed.

Repeat each exercise 3 - 5 times a day.

- **Sitting**
  - Bend your head forwards until you feel a gentle stretch behind your neck.
  - Tilt your head back to look up at the ceiling feel a gentle stretch at the front of your neck.
  - Hold each position for 5 seconds.
  - Repeat 5 times.

- **Sitting**
  - Tilt your head to one side until you feel a gentle stretch. Repeat to the other side.
  - Hold each position for 5 seconds.
  - Repeat 5 times each side.
Sitting

Sit with your shoulders back, turn your head to one side until you feel a gentle stretch. Repeat to the other side.

Hold the stretch for 5 seconds

Repeat 5 times each side

Sitting

Squeeze your shoulder blades down and inwards towards each other.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.

Sitting

Sit up tall. Bring your shoulders back slightly. Gently pull your chin back to flatten the curve at the back of your neck.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 5 times.
If your spinal accessory nerve has been sacrificed during surgery

• The accessory nerve supplies the trapezius muscle which is involved in shoulder movement.

• If this nerve is affected by surgery you will have difficulty raising your arm over your head.

• Your physiotherapist will complete an assessment of your shoulder movement and may teach you further exercises in addition to the exercises in this booklet.

• You may be referred to a local physiotherapist upon your discharge from hospital for further follow-up.

Household activities

• It is important that you are able to complete your normal activities of daily living such as getting washed and dressed, toileting and preparing yourself food and drinks.

• If you are not able to complete these tasks or you are concerned about your ability to do so upon your discharge from hospital a referral to an Occupational Therapist (OT) can be arranged during your admission.
Driving

• Your consultant will advise you about when you may drive again.

• You may need to contact the DVLA and your insurer prior to returning to driving.

• Further patient information is available in a separate driving advice booklet.

If you have any questions about the contents of this booklet please speak to your physiotherapist.
Useful contacts

Your consultant:

Your physiotherapist:

Ward I1 telephone number: 0114 271 2504

DVLA telephone number: 0300 790 6806

DVLA website:

- https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-licensing-agency

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