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 should not be started until this is removed.

- It is safe to start your level 1 neck exercises when the stitches or clips in your neck are still in place. Level 2 exercises should be started **only** after the stitches or clips are removed.

- 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 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

Level 1 exercises:

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

Repeat each exercise 3 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

Sit up tall. Take both your arms out to your side and backwards and feel a gentle stretch across your chest.

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.
Level 2 exercises:

These exercises are to increase your neck movement after your clips have been removed.

Repeat each exercise 3 times a day.

Sitting with your hands clasped behind your head
Bend your head forwards until you feel a gentle stretch at the back of your neck
Hold for 5 seconds
Repeat 5 times

Sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch
Using your hand, gently push your head further round
Hold the stretch for 5 seconds
Repeat to the other side
Repeat 5 times each side
Sitting

Tilt your head to one side until you feel a gentle stretch

Hold for 5 seconds

Repeat to the other side

Repeat 5 times each side

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Sitting

Sit up tall. Bring your shoulders back slightly. Gently pull your chin back to flatten the curve at the back of your neck, using your hands to increase the stretch.

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.

- You will need a physiotherapy assessment of your shoulder and may require 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 7906806

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