

Exercises and advice for patients recovering from thyroid surgery

**Information for patients who have
had surgery for conditions affecting
their thyroid gland**

Following your thyroid surgery, the position of your wound can make you reluctant to move your neck and affect the movements of your shoulders.

Provided your wound is healing well, gentle exercises are beneficial to the healing process and will help to prevent neck stiffness.

The following will help your recovery:

- good posture
- neck and shoulder exercises/stretchers
- scar massage
- gradually returning/building up to heavier physical activity.

Your movements should return to normal about four to six weeks after your operation. Please seek further advice from your health professional if you are still having any problems after this time.

Posture

Be aware of your posture. Try not to 'slump' or round your shoulders. Try to sit and stand upright, with your head up and shoulders and upper back pulled back and down. When sitting, it may help to put a pillow under your arm.



Neck and shoulder exercises

Once any drains are out, exercises will help to improve movement, and reduce swelling, pain and stiffness. Stretches can help to encourage a flexible scar.

How often should I do these exercises?

It is always best to do 'little and often', rather than lots of exercises at one time. Exercising two to three times a day for five to 10 minutes is best.

Please continue with your exercises, even after you have regained full movement and strength, until you have finished your full treatment programme (including any radiotherapy).

Which exercises should I be doing?

1. Head turns

Turn your head to look over one shoulder until you feel the beginning of a stretch. Hold for three to five counts and return to the middle. Then turn your head towards the other shoulder. Repeat five to 10 times to each side, keeping your shoulders still.



2. Head tilt

Tilt your head to one side until you feel the beginning of a stretch. Hold for three to five counts. Return to the middle then tilt to the other side. Repeat five to 10 times to each side, keeping your chin pointing forwards and your shoulders still.



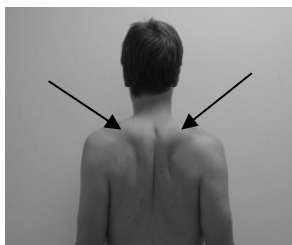
3. Look up/look down

Gently bend your head forward, lowering your chin towards your chest. Return to the middle and then gently raise your chin, tilting your head back, to look up. Only go as far as you are comfortable – you should just feel the beginning of a stretch to start with. Once your wound is fully healed you can stretch a bit more and consider holding the stretch for a few counts. Repeat five to 10 times.



4. Shoulder shrug and roll

Slowly shrug your shoulders, trying to move them at the same speed and timing. Repeat five to 10 times. Then roll them forwards/backwards five to 10 times. It may help to do this in front of a mirror.



5. Shoulder squeeze

Squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for five to 10 counts. Relax and repeat five to 10 times.

6. Forward arm raise

Raise your arm up in front, then continue over and above your head. Use your other hand to help support your arm if it is difficult, or you could slide your hand up a wall, using the wall to support the weight of your arm. Lower down and repeat five to ten times.



7. Side arm raise

Leading with your thumb, raise your arm out to the side and up alongside your head. If it is difficult, slide your hand up a wall or put your hand on your shoulder and lift your elbow out to the side. Lower down and repeat five to 10 times.



How will I know if I have done too much?

You should feel a stretch when exercising – not pain. If you over-exercise, you may well feel sore and stiff the following day.

To avoid this, make sure you exercise **gently** and **slowly**. Aim to do your exercises about 30 minutes to an hour after taking any painkillers.

Please tell your health professional if your wound changes colour, becomes swollen or starts to ooze.

Other things you can do to help your recovery

Keep active

Try to keep as active as you can, for example go for regular walks. This can help maintain a level of fitness to see you through your treatment period. If you feel tired, try doing a little and often, rather than a lot in one go – listen to your body.

Good nutrition

Good nutrition (eating healthily) is vital for your wound to heal. This will help you get back to your normal activities.

Avoid smoking

This will help your wound to heal and can help to avoid other problems. Please ask your health professional if you would like support to help quit smoking.

Scar massage

Massaging the scar can help to improve the size and appearance of your scar, and the range of movement at your neck. Massage should only be started once the wound is fully healed (when there are no scabs or open areas) and you have finished any radiotherapy.

How do I massage?

- Use a non-perfumed moisturising cream.
- Gently press on your scar, moving it and the surrounding tissue with your fingers.
- Make small circles, moving the skin over the tissue underneath, rather than rubbing on the surface of the skin.
- Massage for about 10 minutes, two to three times a day.

If you notice any change in the appearance of your skin, for example it becomes redder, painful or starts to ooze, stop the massage and speak to your physiotherapist.

Returning to normal activities

Provided there are no problems with your wound healing, try to return to normal activities (such as washing and dressing yourself) while in hospital.

You can start to do some light domestic chores as soon as you go home. Try to build up to longer tasks gradually.

For the first two weeks after your operation, try to avoid heavy activities such as hanging out wet washing, and lifting anything heavier than a full kettle, for example shopping bags or children.

If you drive, ask your consultant when it is okay to return to driving. The main considerations for driving are:

- What are the effects of any painkillers you may be taking. For example, do they make you feel drowsy?
- Can you turn your head to look in blind spots without pain or stiffness?
- Can you comfortably tolerate holding your arms up to the steering wheel for the necessary length of time?

Please refer to information on the DVLA website **www.dvla.gov.uk**. If you want to return to driving, it may be worth trying it out in a quiet area with family/friends first, before going out in traffic.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about physiotherapy following thyroid surgery, please contact:

- the **head and neck physiotherapist** on 020 7188 5110/5106. Please leave a message if your call is not answered and someone will call you back. Opening hours are 8.30am to 4.45pm, Monday to Friday.
- the **Blundell Ward** on 020 7188 8862/0804, or
- the **hospital switchboard** on 020 7188 7188 and ask for bleep 2136 or 0694.

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Useful sources of information

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

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