

# Physiotherapy after oesophageal surgery (with a thoracotomy)

**The aim of this leaflet is to help you and your relatives understand the role of physiotherapy following your oesophageal surgery. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor, nurse or physiotherapist caring for you.**

## After surgery

Many people experience some pain after their surgery, especially in the first few days. It is very important that this is managed to help you cough, breathe deeply, walk and sleep.

You should be comfortable enough to cough and move around freely after your surgery which is very important to aid your recovery. If pain is stopping you from doing either of these things, please ask your nurse for more pain relief.

## Coughing

It is very important that you are able to cough properly following your surgery, so that you can keep your chest clear of any phlegm and prevent infections. Some people find it useful to hold or press a towel/pillow to support their wound when coughing, as this can make it more comfortable.

## Walking

Walking is very important to aid your recovery after surgery, and we expect you to be up and walking around the ward during your hospital stay.

The day after your surgery, you should aim to be sitting out of bed, standing with help and walking on the spot. You should progress, with the help of the physiotherapists, to walking a lap of the ward or further, each day. Ideally you will be able to build up to multiple walks a day.

Try to walk at a pace that leaves you slightly short of breath. If you are unable to move away from your bed space, you should march on the spot instead, until you feel slightly breathless.

You will be attached to drips and drains straight after your surgery which will gradually be detached during your stay. They are portable, and should not stop you moving – please ask for help to carry them when you wish to walk.

## Shoulder and back exercises

Some people experience stiffness and pain in their shoulder after surgery. It is therefore important that you try to keep your arms moving as much as possible.

Some of the exercises below may cause discomfort and a stretching feeling, but it is important to remember that they will get easier and can help with the healing process. If it is too sore to do the exercises below, please ask your nurse for more pain relief.

The exercises should be done three to four times a day, particularly on the first day after your operation and while you have chest drains in.

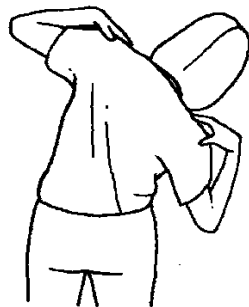
The exercises can be done for both sides of the body, but **concentrate on the side of your chest wound**.



- Keeping your arm straight, lift your arm up above your head as high as you can.
- Repeat five times.



- Lift your arm out to the side and up above your head.
- Repeat five times.



- Put your hands behind your neck or across your chest.
- Slowly bend from side to side.
- Repeat five times.



- Cross your arms across your chest.
- Slowly turn your body as if trying to look behind you, one way, and then the other.
- Repeat five times.

## Exercise Diary

You can use the exercise diary below to record when you have done your exercises:

Day	1			2			3			4		
	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve
Shoulder and back exercises												
Walking												

Day	5			6			7			8		
	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve	AM	PM	Eve
Shoulder and back exercises												
Walking												

## When can I return to normal activities?

We recommend that you wait at least six to eight weeks after your surgery before you start doing more strenuous activities. This should allow your wound to heal fully.

## How will my diet affect my ability to exercise?

You may find it difficult to exercise if you are not able to eat enough. As a result of the operation your stomach will have a reduced stomach capacity, and eating can be a challenge. In order to minimise weight loss you will need to eat a 'little and often' meal pattern. You will see a dietician in hospital, and at your first appointment after surgery, for support and advice on diet.

## When can I drive again?

Most people are ready to drive after six to eight weeks, but it's important that you feel ready to deal with sudden braking (like in an emergency stop). You will need to check with insurance company to make sure your policy covers you.

## When can I return to work?

Most people are able to return to work after about 8 to 12 weeks. People working in more labour-intensive jobs may need more time. If you are unsure then please discuss this with one of our team.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about this leaflet or about the physiotherapy you will receive during your admission, please contact the ward physiotherapist for your ward, Monday to Friday, between 8.30am and 5pm  
Please call 020 7188 5089 or ask for Bleep: 0607.

## 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

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.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

### 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](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

**t:** 0800 731 0319 **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk) **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)