



EXERCISES AFTER BREAST CANCER SURGERY



POORTI-11: Exercises after undergoing breast cancer surgery

The diagnosis of breast cancer and its treatment is a difficult time for you and for your family. But once you recover, it is important to take proper care of yourself, mentally and physically, to be able to lead a normal life once again. You may want to move on at your own pace, and you are allowed. Do not rush with others' timelines. In this phase, you may seek constant assistance from your physiotherapist and counsellor. Once in a while you may also give yourself some "me" time and relax .

During this entire phase of recovery, it is important that your body parts remain mobile, especially after surgery. Surgery is usually the first treatment against breast cancer. The surgery can be

- **Lumpectomy** -- Where the cancer tissue and some of the tissues around the area are removed
- **Mastectomy** -- Where the entire breast is removed. This can be accompanied by removing some of the surrounding lymph nodes (in the armpit area) too.

(If you are feeling more inquisitive about knowing the details of the treatments taken for, you may read more about it in or article [here](#))



As a side effect of the surgery, fatigue sets in your body. You may feel very tired even after taking ample rest. It is important to keep yourself mobile during and after surgery for complete recovery. Simple exercises shall help you restore movement.

You may like to speak to someone who has undergone breast surgery before to gain prior knowledge about the exercises and their duration. It is important that you report any signs or [symptoms of lymphedema](#) immediately to your physiotherapist during this time.

Before you start your exercise regimen, please take the following precautions:

- Do not expose yourself to direct sunlight.
- Wear loose and comfortable clothes.
- The best time to do these exercises would be after a warm shower as the muscles are relaxed.
- Do the exercises slowly.
- Make sure you have the physical strength to exercise.
- Do take deep breaths while you exercise.
- You may feel gentle stretches while doing the exercise; stop immediately if you feel pain.



EXERCISES THAT HELP RESTORE PEACE OF MIND AND REDUCE ANXIETY



Cancer and its treatment is often seen to bring mental distress in oneself. Breast cancer and mastectomy can make women lose confidence in themselves. This is the time to focus on the mental wellbeing and emotional recovery of yourself.

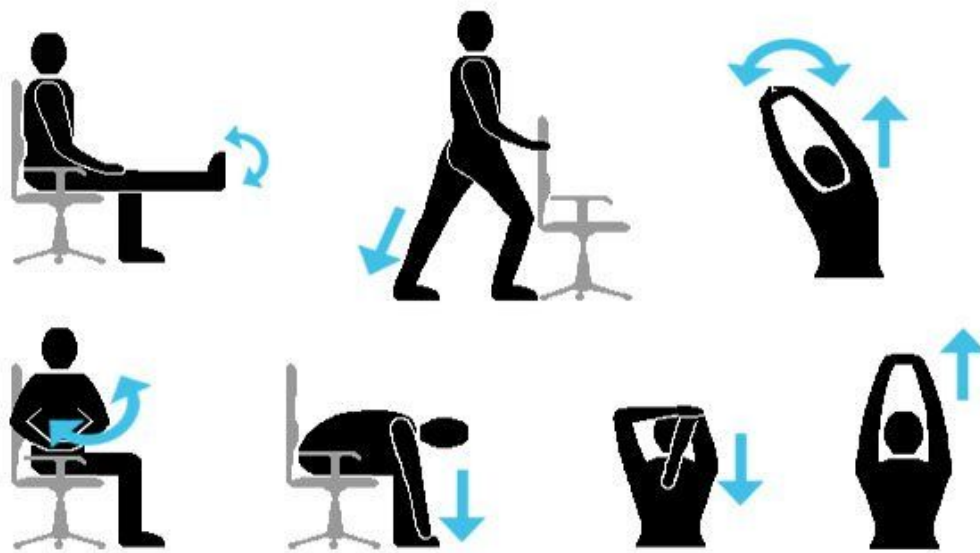
During this time, regular meditation and yoga really helps. Initially, you can try out easy poses like the tadasana (the mountain pose), padmasana (the lotus pose), urdhwa hastasana (the raised arms pose) and shavasana (the corpse pose). These simple asanas improve oxygen supply and blood circulation in your body, making the body more relaxed and improves lung function.

With regular yoga and meditation, you will feel better, stronger and happier. Also, with continuous exercise, you reduce the chances of cancer recurrence in your body significantly.

EXERCISES THAT CAN BE DONE THE WEEK AFTER THE SURGERY

Radiation therapy can affect the movement of arms so you should first start working out on the movement of your arms. Light exercises can be started the week after your surgery. Please take permission from your oncologist and physiotherapist prior start.

- Use the arm of the side of the surgery to do normal tasks like eating, bathing and getting dressed.
- Raising the affected arm above the level of the heart for 30-45 mins twice/ thrice a day. Use a pillow to support your hand. This will reduce the chances of any swelling by pumping out fluids from the arm.
- Exercise the affected arm by opening and closing the arm 3-4 times a day. Use your fists too. Bend and straighten your elbow slowly for fluids to stop building up.
- Practise deep breathing exercises. Lie down on the back and breathe slowly. Intake as much air as you can by expanding your chest and abdomen. Relax and breathe out. Repeat this exercise 4-5 times at least 6 times a day. This will help your lungs function properly.
- Do not lie on the side where surgery has been done.



EXERCISES THAT CAN BE DONE ONLY AFTER THE DRAINS HAVE BEEN REMOVED

With time as you recover, you may like to take up slightly more rigorous exercises that involve more muscle movement:

- **Wand exercise** - Lie on the bed while doing this. In this exercise, a stick like object is needed. Hold the stick near your belly and lift it as much as you can until you feel a gentle stretch. This exercise shall aid your shoulder movement. Repeat this exercise for 5-7 times.
- **Elbow winging** - Lie on the bed with your feet flat while doing this. Clasp your hands behind your neck with your elbows pointing toward the ceiling. Move your elbows apart and down toward the bed. This exercise will help in your shoulder movement. Repeat this exercise for 5-7 times.
- **Shoulder Blade Stretch** - Do this exercise by sitting on a chair with your back against it. Put the affected arm on the table and try to slide it forth on the table as much as you can. Relax the arm. Repeat this exercise for 5-7 times.
- **Shoulder Blade Squeeze** - Sit on a chair while doing this exercise. Do not rest your back on the chair. Squeeze your shoulder blades together, bringing your elbows behind you until you feel a gentle stretch. Return to starting position and repeat this 5-7 times.



- **Side bends** - Sit on a chair while doing this. Clasp your hands and lift your arms slowly over your head by stretching your hand. Bend to your left and right in a pendulum like motion twice and then relax yourself. Repeat this 5-7 times.
- **Shoulder stretch** - Stand facing a wall during this. Put your arms against the wall and start climbing the wall using your fingers. Reach as high as you can until you feel a gentle stretch. Try to do this with both the arms in turn. But initially you may feel more comfortable doing this with the arm which has not been affected by surgery.

You may stop exercising in case you encounter the following:

- Feel like you are getting weaker
- Feeling sensation of pain or tightness. A feeling of your arms being “chorded” is natural but it should not be painful
- Have a swelling that gets worse
- Have headaches or dizziness
- Develop newer areas of numbness

In case you develop any of these, seek assistance from your physiotherapist. It is important to keep yourself safe during this period.

If you are looking at taking up heavier exercises or martial arts, undergo proper physiotherapy sessions followed up by visits to your oncologist to ensure that your body is ready to take them up.

Exercises are usually seen to bring amazing positive effects to your body within 3-4 weeks of doing them regularly. Exercises shall strengthen your body muscles, improve lung function, improve mental health, reduce stress and anxiety and other benefits like better metabolism.

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