

Exercises after upper body lymph node removal or breast surgery – women

Surgery may limit the strength and movement of your arm. Exercise is an important part of your recovery. The goal is to be able to do the same things with your arm as you were doing before your surgery.

Doing these exercises after surgery will help you:

- restore and maintain movement of your arm and shoulder
- regain the ability to do daily activities
- prevent, control or decrease pain and swelling
- decrease the stiffness and restore the movement of your head and neck
- improve well-being

These exercises are also important after radiation therapy. This type of cancer treatment can continue to affect the arm and shoulder for several months. Exercises can help the arm stay flexible. It is beneficial to continue doing exercises for 2–3 months after finishing radiation treatment.

General tips for exercising:

- Every woman is different and heals at her own pace
- Try to go a little further with each exercise every day, but do not overwork yourself
- Do the exercises until you feel a gentle stretch, but not to the point of pain
- Stop and rest if you feel tired or have pain
- If you have increased pain or discomfort, you have probably done too much
- When you start your exercises after surgery it is a good idea to take your pain medication about 30 minutes before you begin
- Try doing exercises after a shower when muscles are warm and relaxed
- Take slow, deep breaths when doing each exercise. Deep breathing helps fill the lungs completely and can also improve relaxation. Breathe in as much air as possible while trying to expand the chest and stomach like a balloon. Relax and breathe out slowly and completely.
- Always warm up before exercising and cool down afterward to avoid injury



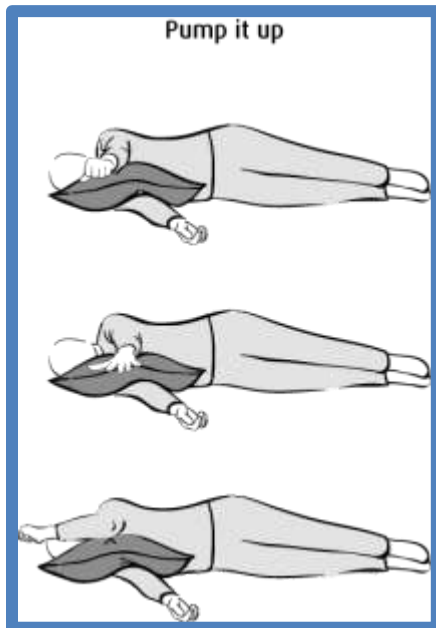
Lymphedema is swelling that can occur when the lymph nodes are surgically removed. Lymph nodes normally act as filters and pathways to circulate lymph fluid through your body. If the lymph nodes that are left can't do their job properly, lymph fluid can build up in the hand or arm

**Report any unexplained pain or swelling
In the hand or arm to your doctor**



First week after surgery

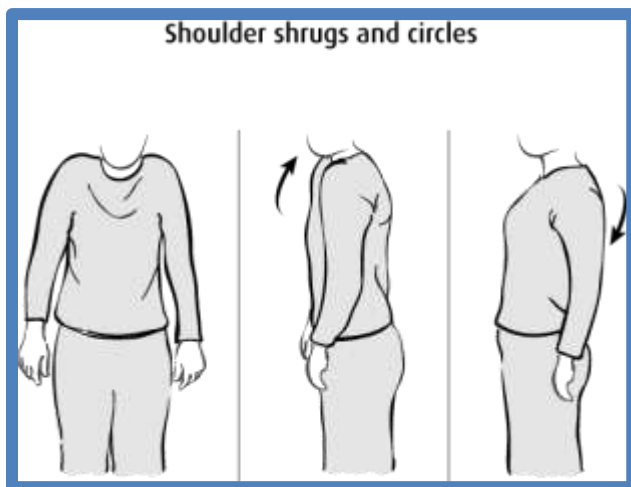
Pump it up



This exercise helps reduce swelling after surgery by using the muscles as a pump to improve the circulation in the affected arm (on the same side as the surgery). This can be done lying or sitting.

- Lie on the non-surgical side with arm on the surgical side straight out in front of you, above the level of the heart (use pillows if needed) **OR** sit in a chair with good back support with the arm on the surgical side supported by pillows
- Slowly open and close the hand. Repeat 15-25 times
- Slowly bend and straighten the elbow. Repeat 15-25 times

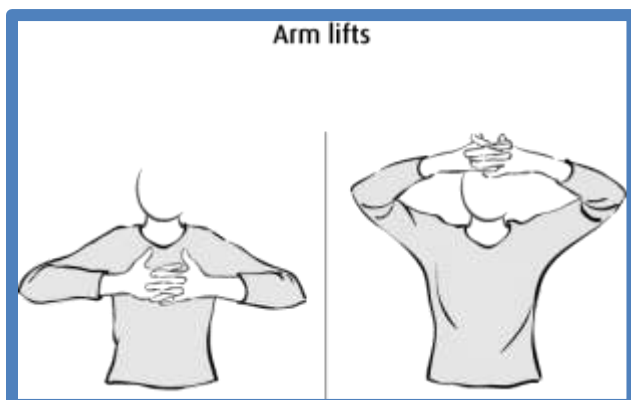
Shoulder shrugs and circles



This exercise can be done sitting or standing.

- Lift both shoulders up toward the ears. Hold for 5 seconds, then slowly drop them down and relax. Repeat 5-10 times.
- Gently rotate both shoulders forward and up, and then slowly back and down, making a circle. Switch directions. Repeat 5-10 times in each direction.

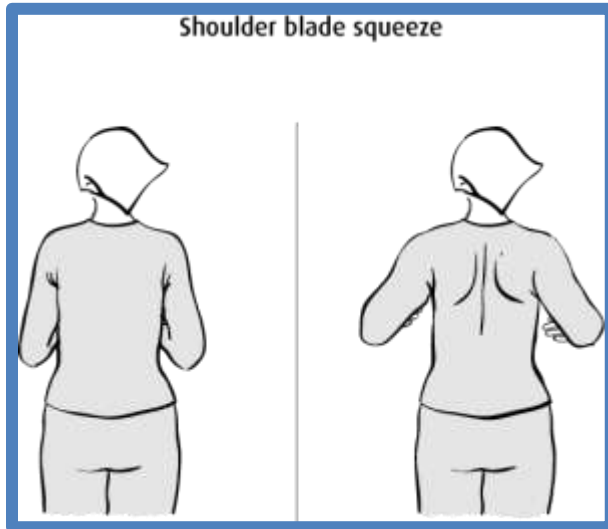
Arm lifts



This exercise can be done sitting or standing.

- Clasp hands together in front of the chest. Extend the elbows so your arms are out in front of you, but your elbows are not locked.
- Slowly lift the arms upward until a gentle stretch is felt. Hold for 1-2 seconds and then slowly return to the start position.

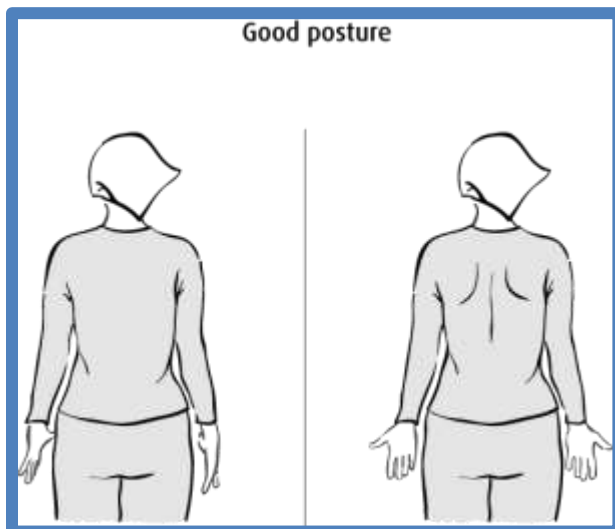
Shoulder blade squeeze



This exercise helps improve posture and movement in the shoulder. It can be done sitting, without resting against the back of the chair, or standing.

- Place arms at your sides with elbows bent.
- Gently squeeze the shoulder blades together. Keep shoulders level and take care not to lift or shrug the shoulders. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Relax and return to start position.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

Good posture



This exercise helps improve posture and movement in the shoulder. It can be helpful to use a mirror to check your movements. It can be done sitting, without resting against the back of the chair, or standing.

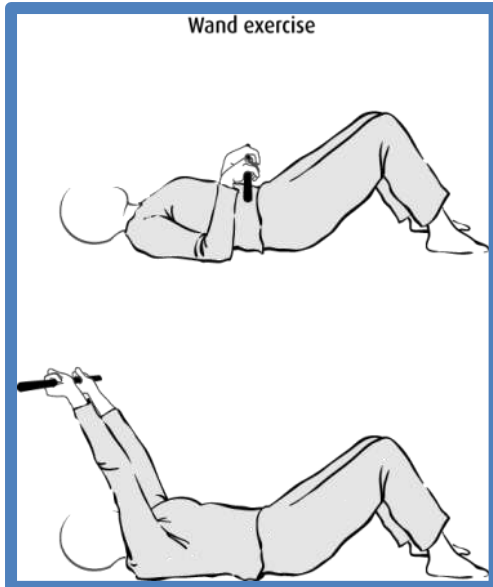
- Arms should be down at each side with elbows straight and palms facing the body.
- Open the chest, gently squeeze the shoulder blades together and rotate thumbs so that the palms face forward. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Relax and return to start position.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

7 days after surgery – when you no longer have drains

There should not be any pain or pinching during these exercises – stop the movement if there is.

Wand exercises

This exercise helps improve the forward movement of the shoulder. You will need a “wand”, such as a broom handle, stick or cane, to do this exercise.



Position 1

- Lie on your back with knees bent. Hold the wand in both hands (palms facing down), with hands shoulder width apart and elbows bent.
- Straighten your arms and lift the wand over the head until you feel the stretch. The unaffected arm helps lift the wand. Hold for 1-2 seconds. Lower arms.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

Position 2

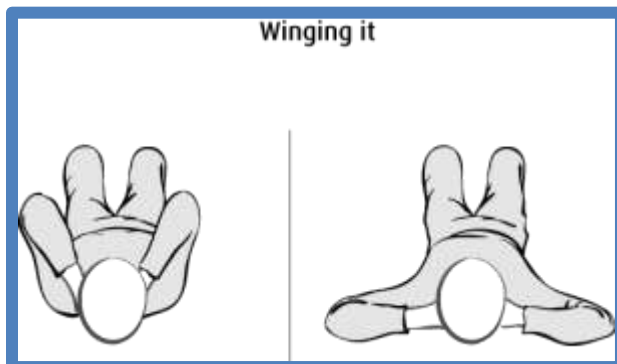
- Repeat with palms facing down, but with hands slightly wider apart than the hips or shoulders.

Position 3

- Repeat with palms facing up (undergrip) and the hands hip width apart.

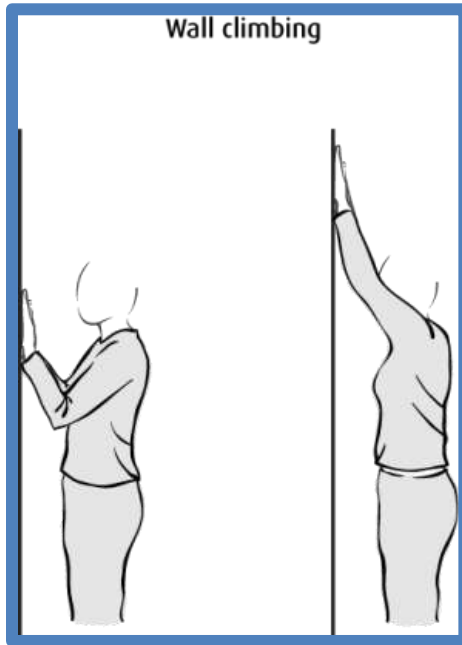
Winging it

This exercise helps improve movement in the front of the chest and shoulder. It may take several weeks of regular exercise before you can get the elbows close to the floor. If there is pain or pinching in the shoulder, place a small pillow behind the head, above the affected shoulder.



- Lie on the back with knees bent. Clasp hands behind the neck with elbows pointed up to the ceiling (If putting hands behind the neck is too uncomfortable, place fingers on the forehead with palms facing up).
- Move elbows apart and down toward the floor. Hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

Wall climbing



This exercise helps increase shoulder movement. Try to reach a little higher up on the wall each day.

- Stand facing the wall, about 5 cm (2 inches) away. Place both hands on the wall at shoulder level.
- Use the fingers to climb up, or slide hands up, the wall until you feel the stretch.
- Return to start position.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

Snow angels



This can be done lying on the floor or on a bed.

- Lie on back and extend arms out at the sides.
- Move arms up to the head and down to the thighs and repeat (like making an angel in the snow).
- Repeat 5-10 times.

General conditioning

Regular aerobic exercise will improve a person's general physical condition. It can help with recovery and has many health benefits. Talk to your health care team about when to begin this type of exercise.

Aerobic exercise can help:

- improve cardiovascular fitness, which is how well the heart, lungs and blood vessels deliver oxygen to the muscles
- maintain a healthy body weight
- reduce stress and anxiety
- you cope with cancer

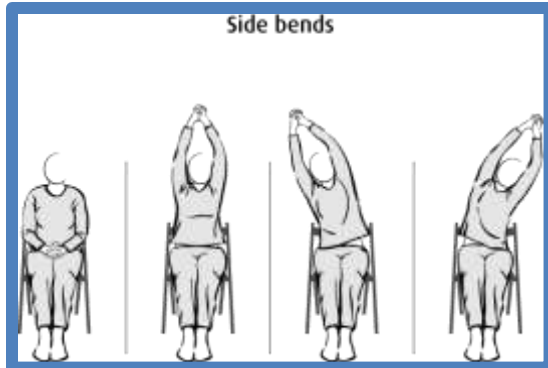
Some examples of aerobic exercise:

- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Running
- Cycling
- Cross-country skiing
- Dancing

More advanced exercises:

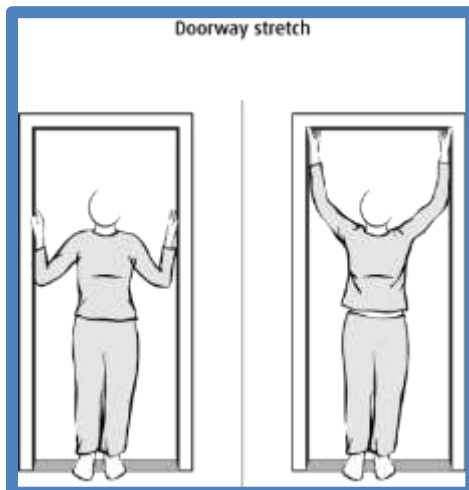
Once there is good movement in the shoulder, you can try more advanced stretches. By the end of this stage, there should be full movement of the affected arm and shoulder. Continue doing all of the exercises until both arms are equally strong and move easily. This may take 2–3 months.

Side bends



- Sit in a chair and clasp hands together on the lap.
- Slowly lift arms over the head, keeping elbows slightly bent.
- When arms are above the head, bend at the waist and move the body to the right. Hold 1-2 seconds.
- Return to the centre, and then bend to the left. Hold for 1-2 seconds.
- Repeat 5-10 times.

Doorway stretch



This exercise helps increase shoulder movement.

- Stand in doorway and place each hand lightly on either side of the door frame
- Slide hands up until you feel the stretch
- Return to start position
- Repeat 5-7 times

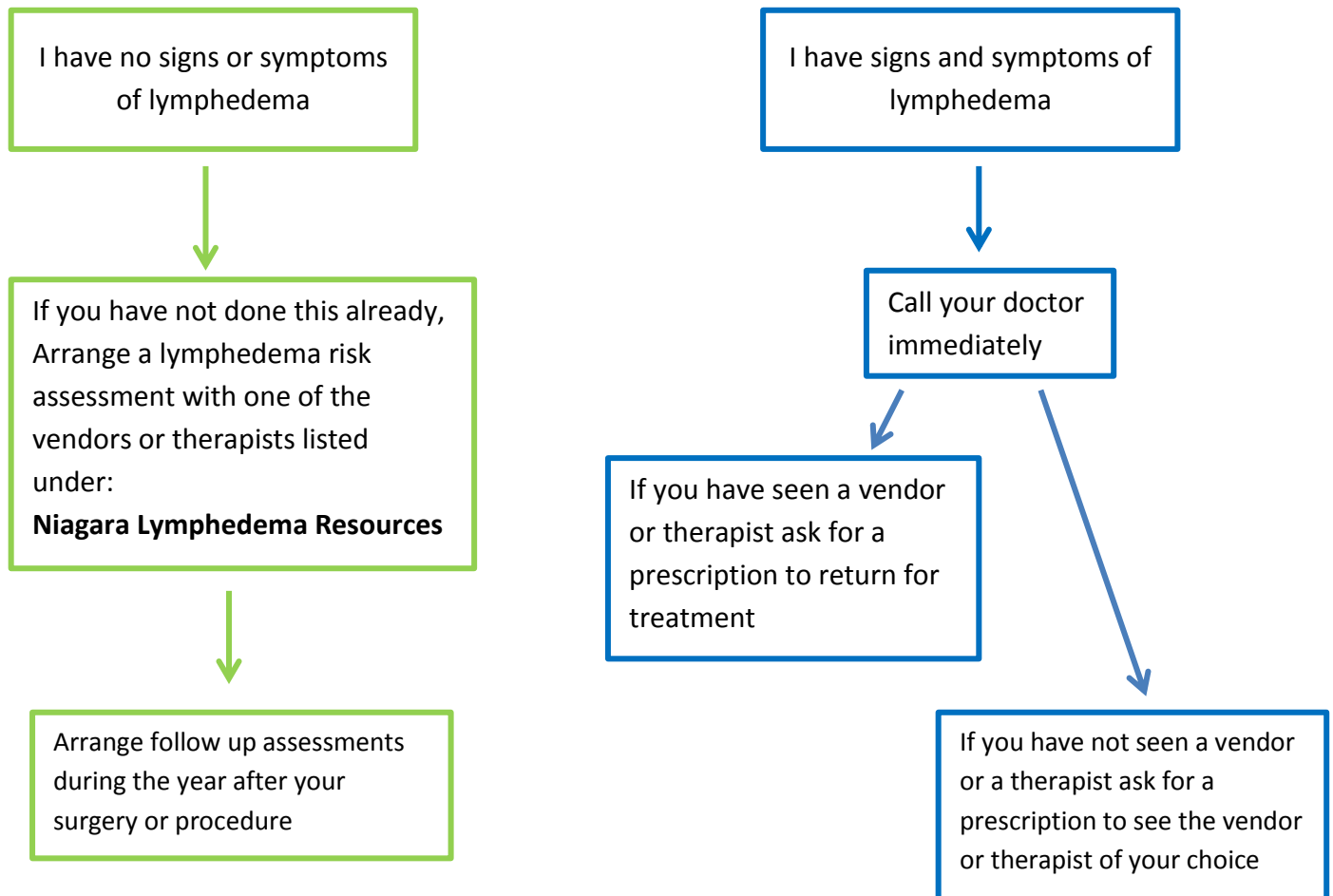


Go with the flow – Lymphedema education and support Walker Family Cancer Centre – Level One

Join us on the **second Tuesday of every month** for an informal education session that includes demonstration of recommended exercises

Drop in or call 905-682-6451 to register

Care pathway for patients after lymph node surgery or procedure



It is ideal to see someone with specialized training in lymphedema management before symptom happen. They can provide more information about lymphedema management. You may never develop lymphedema, but if you do treatment and management are best if baseline measurements are available.

The **Lymphedema Management Referral** is used to help get information from your doctor to the vendor or therapist who is assessing or treating you.

Niagara Lymphedema Resources

ADP Vendors for Compression Garments

Hauser's Pharmacy (free education/ baseline measurement)	St Catharines	1200 4 th Ave. (Niagara Health System, St. Catharines Site) L2S 0A9	905-685-3030
Niagara Prosthetics & Orthotics Corp. (free education/ baseline measurement)	St. Catharines	547 Glenridge Avenue and 1200 4th Ave. L2T 4C2 (Niagara Health System, St. Catharines Site)	905-688-2553
Pharmx Rexall Drug Stores (Rexall Dell 8212)	St Catharines	105 Queenston St., L2R 2Z5	905-938-5138
Pharmashield Dispensary	Niagara Falls	5400 Portage Road, L2G 5X7	905-356-8482

Assistive Devices Program

- Patients with Lymphedema can access the ADP program to receive supplemental funding, covering 75% of the cost of compression garments authorized through ADP. The patient then pays the remaining 25% and if they have supplemental insurance, submits invoices for refund.
- An application is completed initially and every 2 years a renewal is required. See website below for more details:
 - o http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/adp/pub_adp.aspx#

ADP Authorizers in Niagara

- Susan Tomczuk at Hauser's Pharmacy (905)685-3030
- John Mulligan RMT (905)687-1828
- Vivian Dim at Niagara Prosthetics and Orthotics, Mondays 2-4PM (905)688-2553

Manual Lymphatic Drainage Therapists

- 1) John Mulligan RMT/CLT-LANA (905) 687-1828 john@lymphedematherapist.com
- 2) Cindy Schultz RMT (905)684-6066 clcschultz@gmail.com
- 3) Susan Ryczko RMT/CDT (905)704-1744 susanryczko@hotmail.com

Manual Lymph Drainage

- Increases the flow of lymph fluid and activates collateral pathways
- Can treat many types of swelling associated with surgery or trauma – promotes wound healing

Indications: Edema, lymphedema (primary or secondary), swelling due to trauma, promotion of wound healing, dermatological conditions, obstructive edema

Contraindications: Uncontrolled cardiac failure, renal failure, pulmonary failure, acute infections

Complex Decongestive Therapy

4 Components	2 Phases
Manual Lymph Drainage	Intensive Phase: consists of the 4 components, plus patient education. Compression is used 23 hours/day
Compression Therapy	
Decongestive Exercise	Management Phase: patient applies practices and principles learned in intensive phase to manage condition
Skin care	

Indications: Lymphedema, primary and secondary. A modified version is used for non-healing ulcers, lipedema, mixed edemas

Contraindications: Uncontrolled cardiac failure, renal failure, pulmonary failure, acute infections. Malignant cancer is a relative contraindication.

Compression garments

Compression sleeves, gloves and gauntlets are the types of compression garments used for arm lymphedema. These garments are made of strong elastic fabrics. They are worn during the day and removed at night. Replace compression garments every 4 to 6 months as they lose their elasticity and do not work as well.

You need a prescription to buy them. They can be expensive and the costs can be shared by accessing the Assistive Devices Program (ADP). Please talk to your health care team about the referral process.

Lymphedema Management Referral

Patient Name: _____

Primary Physician: _____

Referred by: _____ **Contact Info:** _____

Diagnosis:

Area Affected:

Lymphedema (chronic)

Swelling (acute)

Chronic Venous Insufficiency

Combined lymphedema

Lipedema

Other _____

Right Arm

Right Leg

Right Foot

Other: _____

Left Arm

Left Leg

Left Foot

Doppler done

Suggested Treatment/Service:

- Information on treatment options, garments and available funding
- Massage Therapy: Manual Lymph Drainage
- Massage Therapy: Complex Decongestive Therapy
- Compression Garment

Comments: