



Queen Victoria Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Post-operative Exercises Latissimus Dorsi Free Flap



These exercises should be started following your surgery. Breast surgery is complex and can affect the shoulder joint, arm, and thoracic spine. Post-operative physiotherapy exercises can help prevent problems such as pain, reduced movement and reduced strength.

Do not lift your elbow above your shoulder for 7 days following your surgery.

The nerve that makes the latissimus dorsi muscle work may still be attached: therefore movements that make this muscle contract should be avoided for the first four weeks.

These movements include activities such as pushing up from a chair or bed with the affected side, pulling your arm tightly into your side (adduction) and moving your arm straight behind you (extension.)

You should also avoid lifting, please follow precautions given to you by your surgeon following your operation.

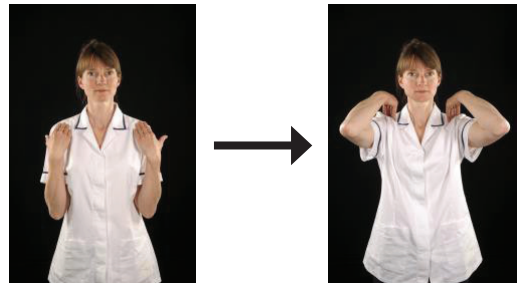
Week 1

Try to use your arm for light activities up to shoulder height. Avoid taking your arm above shoulder height.

The following exercises should be performed three times each day for the first four weeks following your surgery:

Short lever flexion

- Bend your elbows and rest your hands lightly on your shoulders.
- Raise both your arms out in front of you so they are at right angles to your body; do not lift elbows above the height of your shoulders
- Slowly lower down to your side.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



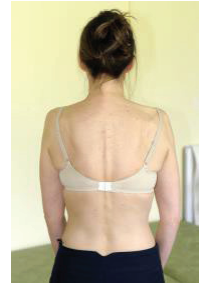
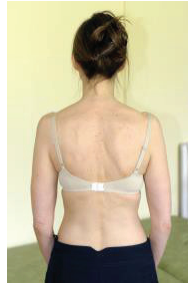
Short lever abduction

- Bend your elbows and rest your hands lightly on your shoulders.
- Raise both your arms out to the side so they are at right angles to your body; do not lift your elbows above the height of your shoulders.
- Slowly lower down to your side.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



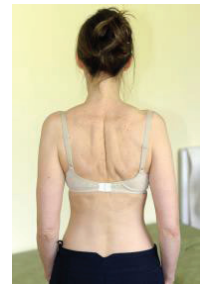
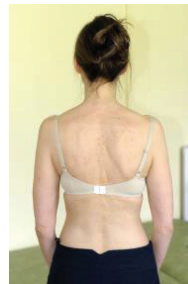
Scapular protraction

- Relax your arms down by your sides.
- Roll your shoulders forwards, you should feel a stretch across the back of your shoulder blades (scapula).
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



Scapular retraction

- Relax your arms down by your sides.
- Roll your shoulders backwards, squeezing your shoulder blades (scapula) together.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



Shoulder shrugging and rolling

- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears and then relax down.
- Roll your shoulders backwards.
- Roll your shoulders forwards.
- **Repeat each 5-10 times.**

Week 2

You can start to use the arm for light activities above shoulder height. Add the following exercises to your regime:

Short lever external rotation

- Touch your ears, keeping your elbows slightly forwards.
- Make sure you do not pull on the back of your head/neck.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



Short lever internal rotation

- Reach your hands behind you trying to touch the middle of your back.
- You can do both hands together or one at a time.
- **Repeat 5-10 times.**



Scapular protraction in lying

- Lying on your back with your head supported.
- Reach your arm straight up towards the ceiling.
- Stretch your arm out further towards the ceiling feeling your shoulder starting to lift off the bed.
- Hold for 10 seconds then relax.
- **Repeat 10 times.**



Arm across opposite shoulder

- Bring your arm up to shoulder level.
- With your elbow bent reach your hand over the opposite shoulder (i.e. reach your left hand over your right shoulder.)
- **Repeat 10 times on each side.**



Week 4

You may be able to resume driving after four weeks, depending on your progress and ability to control the car. It is important that you gain permission from your consultant and inform your insurance company of your surgery before you start driving.

From four weeks you may start to use your arm for most activities, except heavy lifting and pushing your arm backwards or across your body against resistance. These activities may be started twelve weeks post-op.

You may find that you feel the breast tissue feels like it contracts during certain movements. This is common. It may take several months for the latissimus dorsi muscle to feel like part of the breast, not the back.

Add the following exercises to your regime:

Active assisted shoulder flexion in supine

- Lying down with your head supported.
- Clasp your hands together, keeping your elbows straight.
- Lift your arms up above your head as far as you can.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- **Repeat 10 times.**



Active abduction (wall walking)

- Stand sideways with your affected side next to the wall.
- Walk your arm up the wall, keeping your elbow straight.
- Step in towards the wall as your arm gets higher until your armpit is against the wall.
- **Repeat 10 times.**



Abduction with trunk side flexion

- Reach your affected arm over your head in sitting or standing.
- Bend sideways at the waist reaching your other arm down towards the floor until you feel a stretch down your side.
- Hold for 10 seconds.
- **Repeat 10 times.**



Scar massage

You should start scar massage once your wounds have healed (about 2-3 weeks). Massage over the donor site and chest wall to ensure that the skin remains supple and prevent the scar from adhering.

You may require help reaching your back. If you have difficulty with this, please contact your therapist.

- You can use any oil (for example sunflower oil. We advise you not to use Vitamin E oil or olive oil) or non-perfumed moisturizing cream. (we advise you not to use aqueous cream) to massage.
- Your scars are susceptible to sun damage and you should keep your scars covered with clothing or wear factor 50 sun block.
- You should massage in small circular movements over the scar. Your therapist will demonstrate this for you.

- You should begin gently to get used to the massage and gradually increase pressure. You are aiming to massage firmly enough to blanch or lighten the skin.

Future management

If at six weeks you are experiencing shoulder pain or reduced active range of movement in your shoulder, please contact your GP for referral to your local physiotherapy department.

Therapist's name.....Phone: 01342 414004

If you'd like to find out how you can support QVH,
please visit www.supportqvh.org



Please ask if you
would like this leaflet
in larger print or an
alternative format.

Issue 4 – Ref: no. 0514
Approved by the Patient Information Group
Print January 2024 – Review January 2027