

Exercises for the Upper Limb

This leaflet offers more information about exercises for upper limb amputees / congenital limb loss. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

Why do exercises for your upper body?

Exercises for the shoulders and upper body are important for maintaining good posture. They also improve range of movement to enable you to perform everyday tasks, like washing under your arm. Exercises help to keep you pain free and help to prevent future joint problems.

After an amputation, most people tend to want to protect and hold their residual limb hugged into their body. Try not to do this, as it can lead to muscle shortening, weakness and stiffness.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

The sooner you start to move, touch and massage your arm the better it will start to feel.

As your confidence grows, try to swing both your arms when you walk. This is not only good for your shoulders, but it also looks more natural.

Some of the exercises are based on Pilates. This has become a popular method for improving and maintaining good posture and well controlled limb movements. It also improves stability of your spine and shoulders to decrease the risk of injury.

The following exercises should all be performed starting with good posture. Please see the next page on how to achieve this.

All these exercises can be adapted to be easier or harder depending on your need. Your therapist should advise you on this.

Finding your correct posture

Most people tend to have a slumped posture. This can lead to headaches, neck and back stiffness and pain.



Sit up tall and imagine a string attached to the crown of your head. Picture your entire spine being pulled or lengthened as the string is pulled upwards.

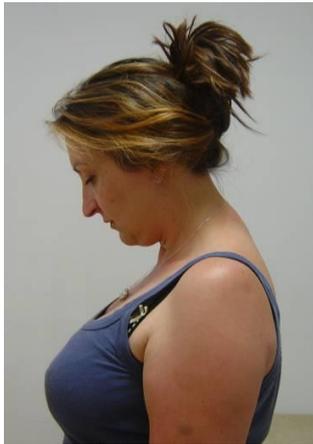
You should feel a lengthening of the back your neck. The action should be gentle, so don't overdo it.



- To find the neutral position of your shoulder blades:
- Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears first,
- Then draw your shoulders downwards and inwards in the shape of a “V”.
- You should feel your collarbones widen across your chest.

Start all your exercises in the correct posture as described previously.

Neck Exercises



Neck flexion

Gently roll your chin down towards your chest and hold for five seconds



Neck extension

Gently look up towards the ceiling and bring back to the starting position.



Left and right rotation

- Turn your head to look over each shoulder.
- Imagine you are following a line drawn horizontally on the wall.
- Hold for five seconds



Side Flexion

- Take your ear towards your shoulder.
- Try to not lift your shoulder up to your ear.
- Hold for five seconds.

Shoulder Exercises

Shoulder Flexion

- Leading with your thumb, raise your arms up as high as you can without lifting your shoulders.
- You can also perform this exercise while lying down.
- Repeat ___ times.



An alternative to the above exercise is to slide your arms on a table. Imagine you are polishing the table forwards and back, side to side and round in big circles in both directions.



Shoulder External rotation

- With your elbows bent and tucked into your side, roll your arms outwards and hold for five seconds.
- Keep your elbows tucked into your side at all times.
- Repeat __ times.



Shoulder Abduction

- With your arms by your side, lift your arms up and out to the side with your palms facing up.
- Try to go as high as you can.
- Make sure you don't shrug up your shoulders as you do this exercise.
- Repeat __ times.



Elbow Flexion

- Bend and straighten your elbows.
- Repeat ___ times.



Lower Trapezius and Deep Neck Flexors

- Lie on your front with your forehead resting on a small pillow or folded towel.
- Back of your neck long.
- Arms resting long beside your body with palms facing inwards.



- Slide your shoulder blades gently downwards away from your ears.
- Reach from the shoulder blades to the fingertips towards your feet and allow your arms to hover one to two inches off the mat. Keep the palms facing inwards.
- Your head remains down with your neck long.
- Relax the shoulder blades and allow the arms to lower.
- Repeat ___ times.



Upper Back Rotations

- Sitting up against the back of the chair.
- Twist round by using your arms on the chair to pull you round.
- Make sure your hips remain square to the back of the chair.
- Hold for 20-30 seconds.
- Repeat ___ times.



One Arm Opening

- Lie on your side with your head supported on a small pillow.
- Arms reaching in front of your body and resting on top of one another.
- Have your hips bent up to about 45° and your knees to about 90°.
- Have your shoulders and hips stacked on top of one another.
- Draw your top hip away from the top shoulder to create a small space between your waist and the mat / bed.



- Reach your upper arm towards the ceiling. Continue to reach your upper arm out to the side. Allow your torso to rotate and your chest to open out towards the ceiling, but keep your hips stacked.
- Your head should follow the movement of your arm.
- Hold for two to three seconds, then rotate the body and draw your arm back on top of your lower arm.



Superman – Below elbow amputees / limb loss

- Start by kneeling on your knees and elbows. Make sure your knees are under your hips and your elbows are under your shoulders. Don't let your chest sink down.
- Find your neutral back position by rounding up and then arching down your back. Stop halfway in-between.
- You need to maintain this position with level hips and shoulders by using your core muscles for the following exercises:



- Keeping your shoulders and hips level, slowly lift one arm out in front of you. Hold up for five seconds and then slowly lower. Repeat with the other arm.



- You can also do this exercise by just straightening one leg out behind you and staying on both elbows.
- Repeat ___ times.

If you experience any pain, please stop doing the exercise and consult with your physiotherapist.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about any of the above exercises, please contact the amputee therapy team on 020 8487 6042 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm). Out of hours, please leave a message on our answer phone and we will get back to you as soon as we can.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer). **Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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