

Physiotherapy Department

Aintree Site

Lower Lane, L9 7AL Tel: 0151-525-5980

Royal Site

Prescot Street, L7 8XP

Broadgreen Site

Thomas Drive, L14 3LB

Royal & Broadgreen Tel: 0151-706-2000

Head and Neck Cancer Centre

Scapula Free Flap

Exercise and Advice Leaflet

What is a scapula free Flap?

A scapula free flap is an area of muscle, bone and skin taken from your shoulder blade to reconstruct an area in your mouth following head and neck surgery.

The graft is a living graft which means the blood vessels in the graft are connected to the blood vessels in the mouth.

What are the risks of a scapula free Flap?

As with any surgery involving a living graft there is a chance that the blood supply to the graft could fail.

The medical staff will closely monitor the flap to ensure the blood supply is good.

Why should I exercise?

- Following a scapula free flap it is important that you start to exercise your shoulder in order for you to regain full movement.
- You may find that your shoulder movements are restricted after surgery but this is often due to swelling, the position of any drains and clips in your skin.
- Gentle exercise will also help to reduce any swelling in the neck and help prevent shoulder and neck pain and stiffness.

When can I start my exercises?

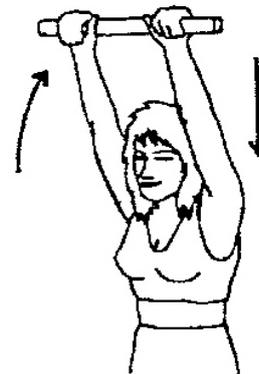
Following your procedure you will have a drain in for approx 2-3 days to drain any excess fluid.

It is best to start your exercises once the drain is removed to allow your arm to move freely and with less discomfort. These exercises are safe to start will clips/stitches still in situ.

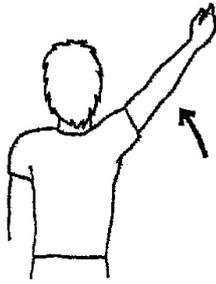
What exercises should I be doing?

Most patients benefit from simple exercises. Following a Scapula free Flap it is important to keep your shoulder and shoulder girdle moving.

As Physiotherapists, we encourage you to start with four simple exercises;



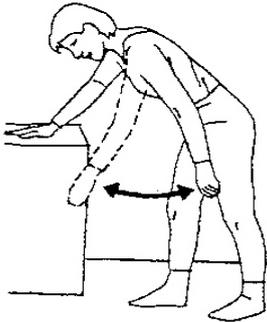
1. The first can be done while sitting or standing. Hold onto a stick/broom handle. Lift your arms straight up above your head then return to the starting position.



2. Again in sitting or standing lift each arm up one at a time out to the side, letting your thumbs lead.



3. In sitting or standing bring your hands alternately behind your neck and back as if to comb the back of your head and stretch your back.



4. Stand leaning on a table with one hand. Let your other arm hang relaxed straight down. Swing your arm forwards and backwards.

How often should I do these exercises?

It is recommended to exercises 3 times a day for approx 5 – 10 minutes. It is also best to do 'little and often'.

Your Physiotherapist will advise you following your operation on exactly what's best for you to be doing.

How will I know if I've done too much?

Over exercising may lead to soreness and stiffness the next day. To avoid this complete all exercises **gently** and **slowly**.

What can I not do?

Following a scapula Flap we ask you not to do any heavy lifting for a few weeks after your operation.

This includes things like lifting your children, carrying heavy shopping bags or hoovering.

Further Information:

Ruth Price
Head and Neck Specialist Physiotherapists

0151 525 5980 Bleep 3335
Ward 28 0151 529 5238
Ward 29 0151 529 5195

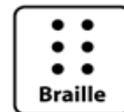
www.headandneckcancer.org.uk

Merseyside Regional Head and Neck Centre

www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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Version 3.0



If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

Tel No: 0151 529 2906

Email: interpretationandtranslation@aintree.nhs.uk