

Shoulder Exercises after Neck Surgery Head and Neck Surgical Oncology

Effects of Surgery on the Neck and Shoulder

There are many nerves and muscles that work together to allow you to move your neck and shoulder. The spinal accessory nerve is a major nerve that runs from the back of the head toward the shoulder. It gives motion to the large muscle in your back called the trapezius muscle. This major muscle moves, rotates and stabilizes the shoulder blade. It helps you shrug your shoulders and raise your arm to the side. Overall, it helps control shoulder movement. This nerve also gives motion to a large neck muscle (sternocleidomastoid) that is important for rotating your head.

Surgery

During your surgery, your surgeon will have to work along many nerves and muscles in your neck that are important for neck and shoulder motion. Sometimes these nerves and muscles may have to be removed as part of your surgery. These nerves and muscles are very sensitive and will likely be weak following your operation. Most people will have recovery of the weak nerves and muscles after surgery, but the recovery may take days, weeks, or even months to recover. During the recovery, patients may experience the following:

- Shoulder pain or muscle spasms
- Decrease in shoulder function and range of motion
- Muscle atrophy (wasting)
- Impact your work and quality of life




Even though our head and neck surgeons use the latest surgery techniques, injury to the nerves and muscles can still occur. However, doing regular exercises can improve shoulder function and reduce pain.

Shoulder Exercises



After your surgery, a physical therapist will show you how to do shoulder exercises. You should do these exercises each day while you are in the hospital. When you go home after surgery, it is important that you continue your shoulder exercises. These exercises can help strengthen your shoulder, maintain range of motion, and reduce your risk for chronic shoulder pain and long term issues with movement after surgery.

Do these exercises at least 3 times a day for up to 1 year after surgery. Most patients will also need to do outpatient physical therapy in addition to these home exercises. This will depend on your surgery and how well your shoulder is recovering. This usually starts 3 weeks after your operation. Contact your primary surgical team if you feel you are not making progress with your recovery.

Patient Education

Exercise	Instructions
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lie on your back as shown.2. Raise the affected arm up overhead as far as you can.3. Hold for 15 seconds and slowly lower arm.4. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times per day.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Lie on your back on a bed or on the floor with your arms in the position as shown.2. Keep your arms against the bed or floor and raise them over your head.3. Hold for 15 seconds.4. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times per day.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. While you lie or recline, reach up behind your head as shown.2. Press elbows backward so that you feel a stretch.3. Hold for 15 seconds.4. Do 3 repetitions, 3 times per day.

Patient Education

	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Relax your shoulders.2. Pinch your shoulders upward towards your ears.3. Hold for 5 seconds.4. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times per day.
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Stand with your elbows bent to a 90 degree position as shown.2. Pinch your shoulder blades together as you rotate your arms outward.3. Hold for 5 seconds.4. Do 10 repetitions, 3 times per day.

Exercise program created by MD Anderson's Rehabilitation Services using PhysioTools®.

Emergency Center

In case of any emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency center. *For non-emergencies during business hours, call our triage line at 904-202-7300 option 3.*

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