

AFTER SURGERY FOR BREAST CANCER START MOVING YOUR ARM GENTLY

- Do not be afraid to move your arm
- Start by moving your arm **as far as you feel comfortable** and gradually move further - aim for movement similar to your other arm
- During each exercise, it is **normal to feel a gentle pulling, aching or slight discomfort**, however **if there is a sharp pain, be a little bit more gentle in how far/fast you move your arm**

WHEN TO START, STOP OR PROGRESS YOUR EXERCISES

1. **Pain:** Pain is **common** following breast cancer surgery, and may be noticeable when you **first start to exercise**. Make sure you follow the advice of your **surgeon and/or doctor about when to start and how to progress your exercises**.

What is 'ok' to feel: When you exercise, it is common to experience some tightness, pulling, soreness, or even mild pain

What is not 'ok' to feel: If you are experiencing **moderate or severe pain** with an exercise **stop that exercise and contact your family doctor, cancer doctor (oncologist) or your surgeon**..

How to get help with progressing your exercise: A **physiotherapist** can help guide you in your exercise program - you can find a physiotherapist using the "Find a physio" feature at www.bcphysio.org/find-a-physio by selecting (1) a location near you and (2) "Area of Practice" - "Breast Health" or "Oncology" to find a physiotherapist best able to help you. If you do not have a computer, you can phone 1-604-736-5130 and they will help you find a physiotherapist.

If you are experiencing moderate or severe **pain that does not stop** within 2-4 hours after you finish exercising, you can contact HealthLink BC by calling 8-1-1 or visiting www.healthlinkbc.ca or to speak to a Registered Nurse at BC Cancer - Vancouver Centre call the Patient Care Nurse Line (Mondays – Fridays, 8:30am – 5:00pm) at (604) 877-6025. Information for additional centres can be found by visiting <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/centres-clinics>

If you experience **severe pain that does not subside** when you stop the exercise, please **visit urgent care** or your nearest **hospital emergency room**, or **call 9-1-1**

WHEN TO START, STOP OR PROGRESS YOUR EXERCISES (CONTINUED...)

2. **Cording**: is a rope-like scar-like tissue that you feel as new and tender in your armpit .

What you may feel: sharp pain, tightness, trouble reaching overhead or lifting your arm over your head, reduced flexibility or tightness in the hand/arm

What you may see: a **visible band or cord** in your armpit which may extend down your arm, past your elbow and sometimes to your wrist

What to do: If you think you have cording, please contact a **physiotherapist who specializes in breast health** and **continue to do your daily exercises** but only to the point that **feel some tension or stretch discomfort, but never into sharp pain**. You can find a physiotherapist by visiting www.bcphysio.org/find-a-physio. Select "Area of Practice" – "Breast Health" or "Oncology" or phoning 1-604-736-5130. It is important for a health care professional to check that the cording is not from the recurrence of cancer, so **if you notice new lumps or bumps please contact your cancer doctor**.

3. **Lymphedema**: is the **collection of fluid** in a area caused by a lymph vessels that are unable to drain the fluid properly.

What you may feel: **heaviness or puffiness** in the arm, jewelry feels tighter, difficulty putting on sleeves of clothing, pain, tingling, reduced ability to move your arm

What you may see: localized swelling in arm and sometimes in the breast/chest area

What to do: It is normal to temporarily have swelling in the armpit, breast, or arm after surgery for 2-3 weeks, but swelling that lasts for 6 weeks may suggest lymphedema. If you think you have lymphedema, please contact your cancer doctor and continue to do your daily exercises. Your doctor may recommend physiotherapy

**WHEN TO START, STOP OR PROGRESS YOUR EXERCISES
(CONTINUED...)**

4. **Frozen/Stiff Shoulder:** is a shoulder joint that is very **stiff and hard to move**, which may or may not be painful

What you may feel: shoulder tightness, discomfort, reduced range of motion (arm is not able to move as much as usual), difficulty reaching for things

What you may see: Generally there are **no visible signs**, but you may see that your shoulder's movement is much less than the other shoulder

What to do: some temporary loss in the movement of your shoulder is normal after surgery. However, with exercise this should improve. If you are experiencing tightness that does not improve with exercise, talk to your cancer doctor. Your doctor may recommend physiotherapy

5. **Infection:** is the collection of bacteria into the body that causes a response from your immune system

What you may feel: increased **warmth, pain, fever, chills**

What you may see/smell: redness, swelling, foul smelling fluid from your incision

What to do: If you think you have an infection, please **contact your family doctor and/or cancer doctor**. If neither doctor is available, **go to the nearest emergency room in a hospital**

WHEN TO START, STOP OR PROGRESS YOUR EXERCISES (CONTINUED...)

6. **Nerve Irritation**: is an over-sensitive nerve

What you may feel: soreness, numbness, tingling or burning in your arm, shoulder, or chest wall

What to do: If you experience numbness or tingling during an exercise, **stop that exercise**, or **don't go as far/fast** into the exercise (**stop before the point where the numbness and tingling starts**). If increased sensitivity continues, there are specific treatments that a **physiotherapist can guide you with that will solve the problem**. You can find a physiotherapist by visiting www.bcphysio.org/find-a-physio. Select "Area of Practice" – "Breast Health" or "Oncology" phoning 1-604-736-5130 . Using your hand or a warm cloth and **gently rubbing or massaging** the area can also sometimes help. If this doesn't help your nerve irritation, **contact your cancer doctor or surgeon**