

Head and Neck Cancer Centre

Neck Dissection

Exercise and Advice Leaflet

Aintree University Hospital **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

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What is a neck dissection?

A neck dissection is an incision made on your neck which extends from your ear down to your chin and allows your surgeon access into your neck and mouth.

This is a common procedure performed for patients having treatment for head and neck cancer

What are the risks of a neck dissection?

The main risk of a neck dissection is injury to a nerve in your neck which controls muscles in your shoulders.

The risk of this nerve (accessory nerve) being injured will have been discussed with you prior to your operation. If affected, this may result in shoulder weakness.

Why should I exercise?

- Following your neck dissection surgery it is important that you start to exercise your neck and shoulders in order for you to regain full movement.
- You may find that your neck and 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?

- Most patients following a neck dissection will have a drain in place for 2 - 3 days to help drain off any excess fluid following surgery.
- It is best to start your exercises when this neck drain has been removed so you are freely able to move in all directions.
- Neck dissection exercises are safe to start when stitches or clips in your neck are still in place.

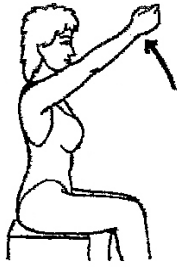
What exercises should I be doing?

Most patients benefit from simple exercises. Following a neck dissection it important to keep your neck, shoulder and shoulder girdle moving.

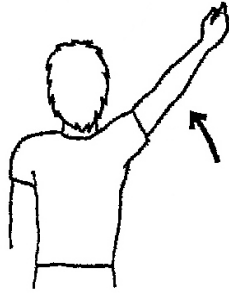
As Physiotherapists, we encourage you to start with four simple exercises;



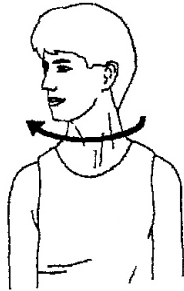
- The first can be done while sitting or standing. Shrug your shoulders together or roll your shoulders in both directions.



- Lift your arms up one at a time letting your thumbs lead the way. Sitting or standing.



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



- Finally, in sitting turn your head to look over your shoulder until you feel a gentle stretch. Repeat this on the other side. With your head facing forward then take your ear to each shoulder again until you feel a gentle stretch. Hold each stretch for 5 seconds

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 neck dissection we ask you not to do any heavy lifting for a few weeks after your operation.

You should take care when returning to driving as you need to have good movement back in your neck to keep your care insurance valid.

Further Information:

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www.headandneckcancer.org.uk

Merseyside Regional Head and Neck Centre

www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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