

Therapy Department

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Head and Neck Cancer Centre

Pectoralis Major Free Flap

Exercise and Advice Leaflet

What is a Pectoralis Major free Flap?

A pectoralis major (or Pec major) free flap is an area of muscle and skin taken from your chest wall 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 Pectoralis Major 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 pectoralis major 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?

You will likely have a dressing over the wound on your chest to keep it dry and sterile.

You will have a drain in for approx 2-3 days following your operation 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.

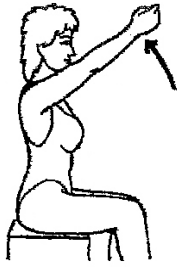
What exercises should I be doing?

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

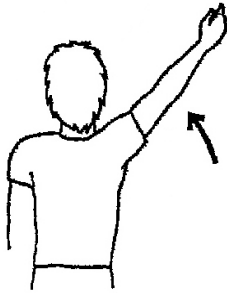
As Physiotherapists, we encourage you to start with four simple exercises;



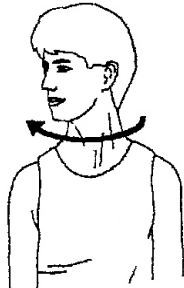
- The first can be done while sitting or standing. Shrug your shoulders together or roll your shoulders in both directions.



- 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 Pectoralis Major 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:

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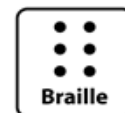
www.headandneckcancer.org.uk

Merseyside Regional Head and Neck Centre

www.csp.org.uk

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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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:

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