

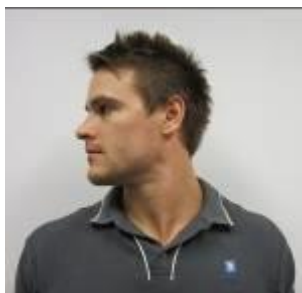
## **Neck Stretches**

3 reps, 3x/day **only when scar fully healed**

1. Look up to the ceiling then down slowly. Hold each movement for 5 seconds. Cease looking up component if you feel dizzy.



2. Turn your head away from the operated side until you feel a stretch. Use your hand to assist stretch as needed. Hold 15 seconds.



3. Tilt your ear away from the operated side until you feel a stretch around the scar. Use your hand to assist stretch as needed. Hold 15 seconds.



## **Head and Neck Lymphoedema**

### **What is secondary lymphoedema?**

Secondary Lymphoedema is chronic persistent swelling that occurs close to your surgical or radiation site. Surgery and radiation treatment damage the lymph vessels and lymph nodes. This decreases your body's ability to reabsorb fluid from your tissues, causing the fluid to build up.

### **Lymphoedema after neck dissection**

A neck dissection may lead to lymphoedema due to removal of lymph nodes and injury to lymph vessels. You may or may not develop lymphoedema, but it is important to know what to look for.

### **What are the common symptoms?**

It is normal to experience the symptoms listed below initially after surgery. However if these symptoms persist for 6 weeks after surgery, you may be experiencing early lymphoedema.

Symptoms of lymphoedema include:

- Persistent, visible swelling in the head, face, neck or upper chest
- Feelings of discomfort or fullness
- Tightness of the skin

### **What do I do if I have symptoms of lymphoedema?**

Request a referral from your surgeon, GP, or any other health professional to receive an assessment by a lymphoedema therapist at your treating hospital.

**RETURN TO ACTIVITY  
FOLLOWING NECK  
DISSECTION**



**HCRA**  
HUNTER CANCER RESEARCH ALLIANCE

## Exercises in Hospital

### Deep breathing

Deep breathing exercises will help your lungs recover after surgery. Breathe deeply 5 times every waking hour.

### Sitting out of bed and walking

After your operation it's beneficial to sit out of bed and walk as early as possible. This will promote recovery of your lungs and muscles.

### Neck and shoulder limitations

Your neck will have limited movement in the first few weeks due to drains being in and the wound healing. While the drains are in, use your arm and move your neck as you feel comfortable.

Once your drains are removed, it's important to regain the movement of your shoulder. When your neck scar is fully closed and healed it's important to turn your head and move your neck normally.

Occasionally people experience shoulder stiffness after neck dissection surgery. The Physiotherapist or Surgeon will check your shoulder movement before you go home.

### Be aware of your posture

Avoid slouching or dropping the shoulder on the operated side. Focus on keeping the shoulder blades pulled back. Keep your head centred, and avoid tilting it towards the operated side.

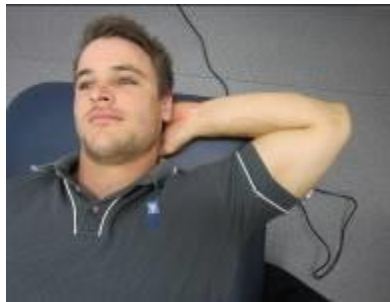
## Shoulder exercises

10 reps, 2-3 x/day

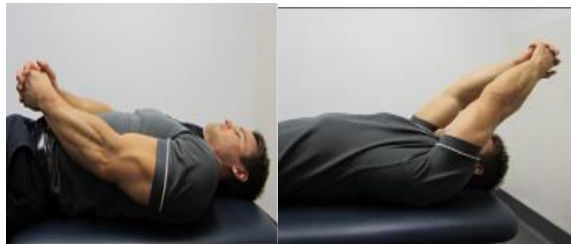
1. Draw shoulder blades back and down slightly.



2. With your hand behind your neck on your operated side, gently bring the elbow back.



3. Lie on back and clasp hands together. Raise your affected arm up and overhead, assisting with other arm as needed.



## When you GO HOME

### 1. Gradually return to activities

Aim to gradually return to normal activity, including walking, over the next several weeks of your recovery. Repetitive overhead activities need to be performed with caution to avoid shoulder injury.

### 2. Massage the scar once the scar is fully healed

Massage gently over the scar site with cream such as Sorbolene or vitamin E. This helps to improve the movement and sensitivity of the scar. Do this for 5-10 minutes, twice a day.

### 3. Neck and Shoulder Exercises

The following neck and shoulder exercises are aimed at preventing neck stiffness **after your discharge home. Start neck exercises after your scar is fully healed. Start shoulder exercises once your drains are removed.** Slowly increase repetitions as able. It's normal to experience temporary mild discomfort during the exercises, which should cease soon after exercise completion.

Perform these exercises with caution during radiotherapy and cease if you have skin breakdown.

### 4. If you have ongoing Neck and Shoulder pain or stiffness

Request a referral from your surgeon, GP, or any other health professional and make an appointment with your treating hospital's physiotherapy department.