

## Exercises for breast surgery patients having sentinel lymph node or axillary node dissection



This exercise sheet is not for patients who have had tissue expanders, implants, reconstruction.

### Guidelines for arm movement

- The exercises below are to help you strengthen and regain full shoulder movement. They will help to decrease the stiffness and tightness you may feel around your chest and shoulder area after surgery.
- They may help to prevent, control or decrease pain and swelling.
- They will make it easier to receive radiation therapy if needed.
- Use your elbow and hand as much as possible for routine activity (brushing hair, bathing, and dressing).
- Call your doctor if you have an increase in pain, redness, or swelling in the affected arm or around the incision.

### General instructions for exercise

#### **Practice the exercises the day before your surgery and start 24 hours after surgery**

- To warm up before the exercises and cool down after, start with and finish with several gentle stretches (shoulder shrugs, shoulder rolls) and remember to breathe deeply.
- All exercises should be done slowly but steadily, increasing your range of motion as you move through each repetition or session. It is important to move up to the point of stretch discomfort but not severe pain. Each day you should go a little further.
- If possible, do the exercises in front of a mirror to maintain correct posture and motion.
- Start with 5 repetitions of each exercise and gradually work up to 10 repetitions within a week. It may help to do 2 sets of 5 repetitions with a short rest between each set instead of 1 set of 10. Do not do more than a maximum of 3 sets of 10 at one time.
- Do the exercise program 3 to 4 times a day. Continue the exercises for at least 4 weeks. At this time if you are still having problems moving your shoulder, tell your doctor.

**Sit on a firm chair or stand with feet shoulder width apart. For each exercise stop when you feel a stretch. Hold for a count of 5. Relax and repeat.**

### **Wall Walking (Key exercise)**

Stand beside a wall. Slowly “walk” your fingers up the wall as high as you can. Hold. Try to reach higher on the wall each time, put a tape mark on the wall to indicate height reached. Expect full extension in 2-3 weeks, if not notify your surgeon. Complete minimum of 3 not more than 10 times per day.



### **High Back Scratch**

With the affected arm, place the palm of your hand on the back of your neck. Gradually try to work your hand down towards your opposite shoulder blade and gently back up.



### **Elbow Pull Back**

Put your hands on top of your head. If you are unable to put them on top of your head, put them behind your neck. Slowly move your elbows back. Hold, and then let elbows move forward and relax.

