

If you have concerns about or feel you are developing any of the mentioned symptoms please contact the physiotherapy department or your breast care team for further advice and information and/or to be referred to the Lymphoedema Clinic.

Precautions for the prevention of lymphoedema

Due to the lymphatic system being impaired following surgery, the following precautions should be adhered to for the foreseeable future.

- Even minor injuries such as scratches, cuts or burns can provide an entry site for infection. Treat these immediately by cleaning and applying an antiseptic.

Important: If your wound becomes red, hot, swollen or painful or if you feel unwell, contact your GP or the breast care nurse.

- Avoid using your affected arm for heavy lifting or heavy housework for four weeks.
- Do not lift anything heavier than a full kettle. Activities such as ironing or hanging out washing can be done if pain free.
- Do not have injections, blood samples or your blood pressure taken on the affected side.
- Wear gloves and long sleeves to avoid scratches when gardening. Wear a thimble when sewing.
- Wear oven gloves to take items from the oven/lifting hot pots to prevent burns.
- Protect yourself from sunburn.
- Don't cut cuticles on the affected side.
- Keep your skin and cuticles well moisturised to avoid dry skin.
- Avoid wearing restrictive clothing or jewellery on the affected side.
- If in an area where you might expect insect bites, use insect repellent or cover up to reduce exposure.
- Avoid very hot baths, saunas or extremes of hot and cold.
- As cuts increase the risk of infection, avoid using wet razors to remove unwanted hair. Use an electric razor or depilatory cream.

- Flying – It is recommended that you wear a compression sleeve when flying. You can contact the physiotherapy department if you require a sleeve.
- Driving – check with your doctor. Only begin driving when you feel comfortable to do so. You may need to check with your insurance company.

General exercise

Physical activity is another key component in your rehabilitation after breast surgery.

Physical activity and exercise provide a wide range of benefits to people diagnosed with breast cancer. The benefits include improved physical fitness, higher self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety, depression and fatigue.

Research has shown that regular physical activity after breast cancer treatment can aid your recovery and also lower your risk of developing cancer in the future.

Most research suggest that 30 minutes of moderate to high intensity physical activity five days a week is associated with a reduction in breast cancer risk. Examples of this type of physical activity include: brisk walking, stair climbing, jogging and cycling as well as household tasks like gardening, hoovering and washing windows or floors.

It is important to start the exercise program slowly, perhaps 15 minutes walking a day, and gradually progress the time and intensity of the physical activities you are doing. Your physiotherapist will speak to you about increasing physical activity and give you ideas at your out-patient physiotherapy appointment.