

Therapy while your arm is in a sling

Information for patients

This booklet provides you with physiotherapy and occupational therapy advice to help your rehabilitation. It is intended as a guide and the therapy you need may vary, depending on your circumstances. If you have any questions, please speak to your therapist.

This occupational therapy advice aims to help you to maximise your independence with completing your activities of daily living (ADL) or everyday tasks, especially while your arm is in a sling. The physiotherapy advice aims to help you to improve the movement, strength and function of your shoulder and arm. It will largely consist of advice and exercises that you do every day at home.

If at any point during your rehabilitation you have difficulty following our advice or the exercises your therapist has given you, please phone the therapy department on 01689 866255 (Orpington Hospital), 01689 864632 (Princess Royal University Hospital) or 020 8299 2368 (King's College Hospital) and ask to speak to one of our therapists.

It is essential after surgery that you do not do anything that risks damaging your arm. For this reason, it is important that you follow all the advice we give you and do only the exercises and the activities that your therapist advises you to.

Your sling

You have been given a sling to protect your arm. There is a variety of slings available, and your surgeon has selected the one most suitable for you. Do not worry if your sling looks slightly different to the one pictured in this booklet. Your sling has been adjusted to fit you, so do not readjust it unless absolutely necessary.

You need to keep your sling on for weeks

During this time, it is essential you always wear your sling, even when you go to bed. You may find it most comfortable to sleep on your back. This position will protect your shoulder by preventing you from moving it. Make sure you do not lean on your arm while it is in the sling. Your consultant will let you know when you can gradually start to wear the sling less often.

Pain control

After your operation, you may find applying an ice pack on your arm gives you temporary relief from any discomfort. You can use an ice pack made up of a bag of ice or a sealed bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel. Apply it for 20 minutes at a time, repeating this every two hours or so, depending on the level of pain. Using ice will also help to reduce any inflammation. If you

have a wound, make sure you do not get your wound or the wound dressing wet. If the sensation has changed on any part of your arm do not use ice without speaking to a therapist or your consultant.

During your rehabilitation always make sure you take your pain relief before you do your exercises.

Your posture



You may find you slouch while wearing a sling, as shown in the photo on the left.

To improve your posture, move the crown of your head towards the ceiling to sit upright, as shown on the right.

Try to always maintain a good posture like this.



Managing at home after your surgery

After your surgery you will need to always wear a sling on your affected arm until your surgeon or physiotherapist advises you otherwise. This may limit you when trying to complete your everyday tasks, but it is important that you avoid any excessive movement with your affected arm. Here we advise you on how to carry out some everyday tasks without harming your affected arm.

If you are unable to manage, please ask for assistance from friends and family or liaise with your local social services.

Your personal care

Key principle: avoid excessive movement of your affected arm

Washing

You can avoid excessive movement with your affected arm, for example, by holding the soap steady in your affected arm while you wash with your unaffected arm.



To wash the armpit of your affected arm, keep your sling on and try to keep your affected shoulder as still as possible. Use your unaffected arm to wash this area using a flannel. Wash under your unaffected arm using your unaffected hand.

Caring for your hair

While keeping your affected arm in your sling, use your unaffected arm to wash, brush or comb your hair.

Cleaning your teeth

Use your affected arm to hold your toothbrush while you use your unaffected arm to apply toothpaste. Swap the toothbrush to your unaffected arm and use this arm to brush your teeth.

If you have dentures, hold them with your affected arm and use your unaffected arm to clean them.

Dressing and undressing

Use your unaffected arm to dress yourself. It's easiest to do this by dressing your affected arm first and undressing it last.

Remember, you must not move your affected shoulder, so you need to gently feed clothes onto your affected arm without moving it.



Try to avoid wearing tops that need to go over your head; ones that do up at the front are easier to manage. Small buttons and zips are also difficult to manage with one arm, so try to avoid these as well.

If you need to wear a bra, fasten it at the front first. As you turn the bra round with your unaffected arm, feed the strap over your affected arm. Place your unaffected arm into the strap last. To remove your bra, unfasten it and then take your unaffected arm out first and your affected arm last.

Slip-on shoes are often easier to manage than lace-ups. But you can buy elastic shoelaces from a range of suppliers.

Domestic tasks

Key principle: avoid excessive movement of your affected arm and remember safety, especially when dealing with hot and/or heavy items

Housework

Avoid heavy housework such as changing bedding or vacuuming. You can try lighter tasks such as dusting with your unaffected arm.

You will find washing up easier if you soak the items first and then rinse them using your unaffected arm.

Avoid carrying any heavy shopping as you will not be able to swap the bag to your affected side when your unaffected arm gets tired. Carrying heavy bags on one side may also affect your balance. Many supermarkets provide online ordering services with home delivery which you may find useful.

Preparing meals

Use your affected arm to keep items still while chopping them with your unaffected arm. Another idea is to buy ready-prepared vegetables.

Use your unaffected arm to put things in or take them out of the oven. Remember that dishes will be hot when they come out of the oven, so avoid lifting anything heavy.

To cook vegetables, pasta, rice and so on, you may find it easier to place these in a frying basket in the water to boil. Then lift the food from the water and drain it using your unaffected arm. Leave the boiling water to cool before emptying the pan.

Always use your unaffected arm to carry items around the kitchen. Make sure you do not carry items which are too heavy. You may find it easier to move things around the kitchen by sliding them along on the work surfaces.

When making drinks or snacks, use your affected arm to keep items still and your unaffected arm to complete the task.

When eating, feed yourself with your unaffected arm only.

Going back to work

Please discuss going back to work with your doctor and your therapist. They will also advise you on starting sporting and other activities again using your affected arm.

Exercises after your operation

Your physiotherapist in hospital will show you exercises you can do while your shoulder is kept still in a sling. These aim to keep your other joints mobile while protecting your shoulder. At first it is essential that you do not move your shoulder at all. You must complete these exercises at least twice each day.

Physiotherapy advice while your arm is in a polysling

Exercises lying on your back



Getting ready to exercise

1. Lie on your back with a pillow under your head.
2. Place another pillow under your affected arm to keep it well supported.
3. Keep your hand on your stomach, undo the velcro ties on your forearm, and push the sling over your forearm and elbow.
4. Do not take the sling off over your head.

1. Exercising your elbow



1. Stay lying on your back with your forearm on your stomach.
2. Move your hand across your body to fully bend and then straighten your elbow.
3. Always keep your hand touching your body to avoid moving your shoulder.
4. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

2. Exercising your forearm



1. Stay lying on your back with your forearm on your stomach.
2. Slowly turn your forearm so the palm of your hand faces up, and then down.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

3. Exercising your wrist



1. Stay lying on your back with your forearm on your stomach.
2. Move your hand to the left and then to the right, keeping the rest of your arm still.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.



1. Stay lying on your back with your forearm and thumb resting on your stomach.
2. Move your hand up and down.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

4: Exercising your hand



1. Stay lying on your back with your hand on your stomach.
2. Squeeze your hand into a tight fist, then straighten you fingers fully and spread them out.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

Once you have finished these exercises you can carefully replace your sling and get up.

Exercises sitting in a chair

1. Exercising your shoulder girdle



1. Sit in your chair with your sling on.
2. Correct your posture by moving the crown of your head towards the ceiling.
3. Slowly move your shoulders up towards your ears, then push your elbows down towards your waist.
4. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.



1. Sit in your chair with your sling on.
2. Correct your posture by the crown of your head towards the ceiling.
3. Slowly move your shoulders forwards, then backwards.
4. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.



1. Sit in your chair with your sling on.
2. Correct your posture by moving the crown of your head towards the ceiling.
3. Pull your shoulder blades downwards and together so your shoulders move backwards.
4. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

2. Exercising your neck

1. Sit in your chair with your sling on.
2. Slowly look to your left and then to your right.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

1. Sit in your chair with your sling on.
2. Move the crown of your head up to the ceiling to make a double chin. Make sure you look forwards all the time as you move your head.
3. Slowly repeat this movement 10 times.

Who can I contact with queries and concerns?

Once you have been discharged from hospital, if you have any queries, please contact:

Orthopaedic Physiotherapists or Occupational therapists (King's College Hospital)

Tel: 020 3299 2368

Orthopaedic Physiotherapists or Occupational therapists (Princess Royal University Hospital)

Tel: 01689 864632

Orthopaedic Physiotherapists or Occupational therapists (Orpington Hospital)

Tel: 01689 866255

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net