

Home Exercises After Sternotomy

In this pamphlet are some of the exercises you may have done with the physical therapist or rehab assistant while you were in the hospital.

We suggest that you continue to do them at home in order to improve your flexibility and prevent stiffness.

Do these exercises daily in the morning for another four weeks and as a warm-up before going out for your daily walk.

Posture

- When walking, standing or sitting, be aware of your posture. Keep your head up, chin in, shoulders relaxed and your back straight.
- Do not hug your chest pillow all the time. Use it to support your incision when painful and when coughing.

Instructions

- Do 10 repetitions of each exercise.
- While doing the exercises, keep your **eyes open** and remember to **breathe** (don't hold your breath).
- All exercises are to be done slowly and smoothly in a comfortable range of movement. Do not bounce.
- If an exercise causes pain, try it more slowly and gently, or avoid that exercise for a few days before trying it again.

Remember:

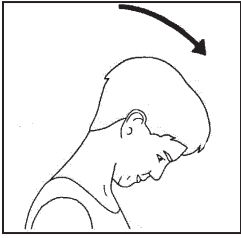
- **Your sternum is not fully healed for 8 weeks after your operation.**
- **Do exercises slowly and avoid any movements that cause pain or clicking of the sternum.**

Home Exercises

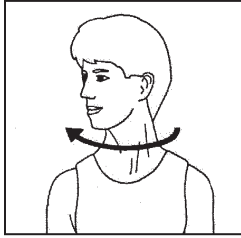
Sit on a chair without armrests, with feet on floor. Each exercise should be a gentle **pain-free** stretch.

Posture Check: Sit tall with head up, chin in and shoulders relaxed with your hands on your lap. Do not lean back against the chair.

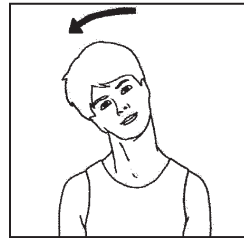
Neck



A) Gently drop chin to chest, then raise chin again.

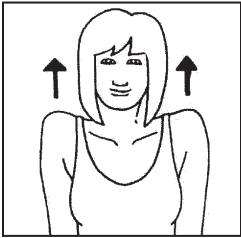


B) Slowly turn head to look over each shoulder.

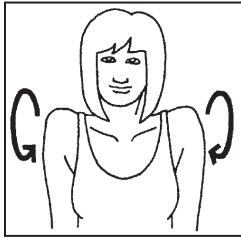


C) Gently tip head sideways toward one shoulder, then to the other shoulder. (Do not raise your shoulders.)

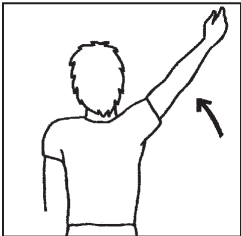
Shoulders



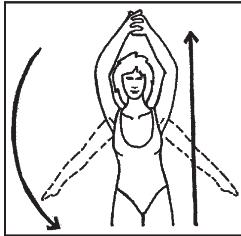
D) Shrug shoulders up towards ears, hold, then relax.



E) Rotate shoulders (not elbows!) forward several times, then backward.



F) Slowly raise one arm above your head, then down again. Repeat with the other arm.

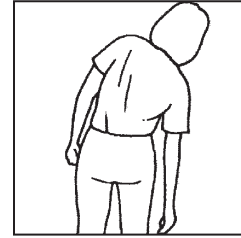


G) Slowly clasp hands together. Raise arms up above your head as high as is comfortable, then back down again.

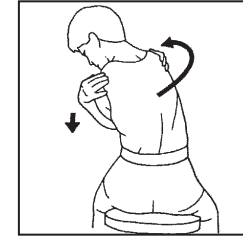
NOTE: If this is painful, try doing one shoulder at a time.

NOTE: It is alright to raise arms over head briefly, as long as you do not hold, lift or push.

Chest



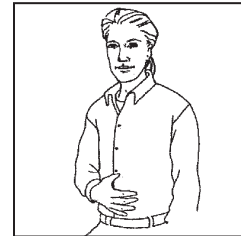
H) With arms by your sides, slowly bend sideways, reaching toward the floor on one side of the chair, then the other. Do not lean forward



I) Fold arms across your chest. Rotate gently through the upper back, turning slowly to look behind you to one side then the other. Remember to breathe!

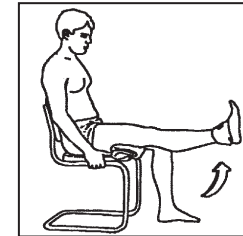
NOTE: If sternum is clicking, avoid these two chest exercises for now.

Breathing



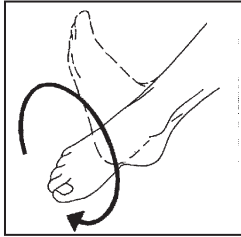
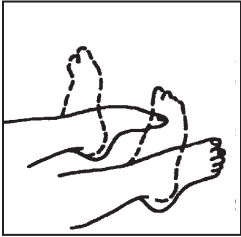
J) Breathe in deeply through nose keeping tummy relaxed. Without raising your shoulders, feel your ribs move outwards. Hold briefly, then breathe out slowly through mouth. Relax a moment, then repeat.

Legs



K) Straighten one knee. Keeping leg straight and ankle bent, lift thigh up off chair and hold for a count of 5. Repeat with the other leg.

Ankles:



L) With legs stretched out in front of you, move ankles up and down, then in circles.

Back:

M) Keeping your back straight, gently reach down to touch your toes. Do not strain.

Watch your posture!

Keep breathing while exercising (Do not hold your breath).

Remember to avoid movements or exercises that cause pain or clicking of your sternal incision.

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