Exercises Following Neck Dissection

A Guide for Patients and Families

MedStar Georgetown University Hospital
EXERCISES FOLLOWING NECK DISSECTION

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Neck Dissection

The neck contains muscles and nerves which work together to move the head, neck, and shoulders. The neck also contains lymph nodes which help to drain fluid from the head and face. Neck dissection is a surgical procedure that involves removal of the deep neck lymph nodes. When a dissection is performed, the spinal accessory nerve is at risk of injury. This can result in pain and weakness and a droop in your shoulder. Exercise can strengthen the shoulder muscle, improve posture, preserve shoulder function, and reduce pain. Exercises are practiced before surgery and are begun again after your neck is sufficiently healed and with your doctor’s approval.

The first three months after surgery are the most important in regaining good shoulder function. Practicing your exercises before surgery has been found to be very helpful when you resume them after surgery. You will be tired and sore after your surgery. Because of this, you may need to divide up these exercises over the day. As your strength improves, you will be able to increase the number of times you can do them. If you have trouble with your shoulder after surgery, your doctor may have you see a physical therapist.

Before Surgery
- Gather together any equipment needed to perform your exercises.
- Practice your exercises.

After Surgery
- Sleep with your head elevated on pillows at least 30 degrees. This will help reduce the swelling after surgery.
- Do not sleep on your surgical side.
- Do your exercises as your doctor advises.
- Call your doctor if you experience an increase in pain.
**Neck Dissection**

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Neck dissection is a surgical procedure that involves removal of the deep neck lymph nodes. When a dissection is performed, the spinal accessory nerve is at risk of injury. This can result in pain and weakness and a droop in your shoulder. Exercise can strengthen the shoulder muscle, improve posture, preserve shoulder function, and reduce pain. Exercises are practiced before surgery and are begun again after your neck is sufficiently healed and with your doctor’s approval.

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**Before Surgery**

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**After Surgery**

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Do not sleep on your surgical side.

Do your exercises as your doctor advises.

Call your doctor if you experience an increase in pain.
Do these exercises while sitting in a chair. You may use your hand to support your head if necessary. Repeat each exercise 5 times.

Neck Mobility and Strengthening

1. Gently bring your head forward until your chin touches your chest. Hold for 5 seconds.

2. Gently let your head fall backwards as far as possible. Hold for 5 seconds.

3. Gently bring your right ear toward your right shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds. Then bring your left ear toward your left shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds.

4. Gently turn your head to the right as far as possible without moving your shoulders. Then turn your head as far as possible to the left without moving your shoulders. Hold for 5 seconds.

Sternocleidomastoid Muscle

Eleventh Cranial Nerve
Neck Mobility and Strengthening

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4. Gently bring your right ear toward your right shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds. Then bring your left ear toward your left shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds.
Shoulder Mobility and Strengthening

Do these exercises while sitting in a chair.
Repeat each exercise 5 times.

1. Roll your shoulders in a circle forward and backward. Do the right side first, then the left, then both together.

2. Sitting up straight, squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for 5 seconds.

3. While holding the sides of a chair, shrug your shoulders upward. Hold for 5 seconds.
Use a cane, yardstick, or umbrella while doing the following exercises. Do these while standing or sitting.

1. While holding your device with both hands in front of your body, raise it as high as possible trying to straighten your elbows. Hold for 5 seconds. Return the device to the beginning position.

2. Swing your device as high as possible to the right. Hold for 5 seconds. Swing your device to the left. Hold for 5 seconds.

Stand about a foot from the wall to do the following exercises.

1. While facing the wall, walk the fingers of each hand up the wall as high as possible and back.
2. Standing with your right side facing the wall, walk the fingers of your right hand up the wall as high as possible and back.

3. Standing with your left side facing the wall, walk the fingers of your left hand up the wall as high as possible and back.

Stand a few inches from a wall to do the following exercises.

1. While facing the wall, slide your hands up the wall as high as possible and lean into the wall. Hold for 5 seconds.
2. Standing with your right side facing the wall, slide your right arm up the wall as high as possible and lean into the wall. Hold for 5 seconds.

3. Standing with your left side facing the wall, slide your left arm up the wall as high as possible and lean into the wall. Hold for 5 seconds.