

Physical Therapy after Major Head & Neck Reconstructive Surgery

Head & Neck Reconstructive Surgery

During head and neck reconstruction, your surgeon may take soft tissue, bone, or both from other areas of your body to be used as part of the reconstruction. Recovery can be difficult, but there are steps you can take to recover and maintain good function of your surgical sites. Speak to your surgeon or physical therapist about how soon after surgery to start exercises.

Rehabilitation of Specific Sites

Neck Exercises

After neck surgery you may experience some stiffness or weakness in your neck, back and shoulders. Certain activities may be difficult. Here are some exercises you can do to help. Only start these exercises when your healthcare provider clears you to do so.

Hold these exercises for 5-10 seconds per side. Do these exercises minimum twice per day.

Head Turn



Turn your head to one side and hold.

Side Bend



Tilt your head to bring your ear over your shoulder and hold

Neck Retraction



While sitting upright, pull your chin straight back without tilting your head.

Neck Flexion/Extension



Slowly drop your chin to your chest and hold briefly. Then gently tilt your head back so you are looking at the ceiling. Repeat.

Forearm Exercises

After having surgery on your arm you may experience some weakness or stiffness. Doing these exercises can help you regain motion and return to your daily activities.

Repeat each of these exercises 10 times per side. Do this minimum twice per day.

Elbow Flexion/Extension



Start with your arm by your side. Bend your elbow as much as possible and hold for 2 seconds. Slowly straighten your arm.

Finger Flexion/Extension



Straighten your fingers all the way out and hold for 2 seconds. Next, squeeze your hand into a fist and hold.

Wrist Flexion/Extension



Rest your arm on an armrest and bend your wrist so your fingers point downward. Then bend your wrist so that your fingers point upwards.

Supination/Pronation



Sit with your arm at your side and your elbow bent at 90 degrees with your palm face down. Keep your elbow tucked in and turn your palm to the ceiling

Lower Leg & Thigh Exercises

After having surgery on your thigh or lower leg, you may experience some stiffness or muscle weakness. Do these exercises to help strengthen and stretch your muscles.

Do these exercises 10 times per side, minimum twice per day.

Mini Squat



Stand up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart. Hold on to something for balance. Bend your knees slightly.

Hip/Knee Flexion



Stand up and hold onto a countertop for balance. Lift one knee to the level of your hip then slowly lower back down.

Hip Extension



Stand with one hand on the counter to keep your balance. Keep your leg straight and kick your leg out behind you. Return to starting position and repeat on the other side.

Hip Abduction



Lie on your side with your body in a straight line. Raise your upper leg toward the ceiling and hold for 5 seconds.

Seated March



Sit in a chair with your back straight. Raise your knee to the ceiling and hold for 2-5 seconds before lowering it back down.

Leg Extension



Sit in a chair with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Straighten out your leg with toes pointed up and hold for 5 seconds.

Back & Shoulder Exercises

After surgery on your back/shoulder, you may experience some weakness or stiffness. Doing these exercises will help. Physical Therapy should start approximately 7 days after surgery.

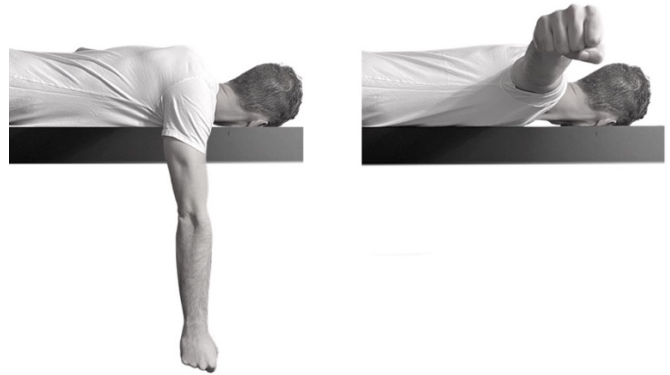
Do these exercises 10 times per side, minimum twice per day.

Shoulder Internal/External Rotation



Stand with your elbow at a 90-degree angle. Rotate your arm outward and inward.

Shoulder Prone T



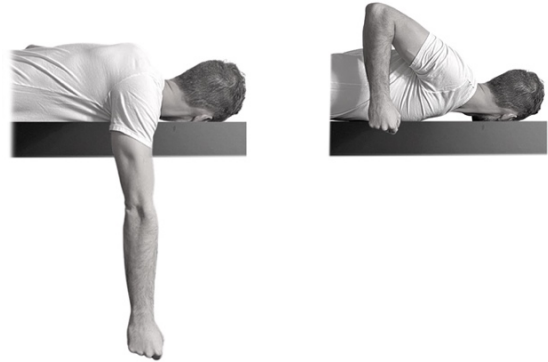
Lie on a bed face-down with one arm hanging off the side. Slowly raise your arm out to the side and hold for 5 seconds before slowly lowering it back down.

Shoulder Prone Y



Lie on a bed face-down with one arm hanging off the side. Slowly raise your arm up in front of you at 45 degrees to make a Y and hold 5 seconds.

Rowing Exercise



Lie on a bed face-down with one arm hanging off the side. Keep your elbow tucked to your side while pulling it up toward the ceiling.

Finger Crawl Side



Stand with your side to the wall and use your fingers to crawl up the wall, stepping closer until your arm is raised over your head.

Finger Crawl Front



Stand facing a wall and use your fingers to crawl up the wall, stepping closer until your arm is raised over your head.

Jaw Stretching Exercises

After surgery on jaw, you may experience some difficulty with mouth opening and chewing. It is important to stretch these muscles. Physical Therapy should start approximately 7 days after surgery.

Do these exercises at least 10x, three times per day.

Jaw Lowering



Using a mirror, put the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth and open your jaw. Keep your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Repeat 10x

Jaw Stretching



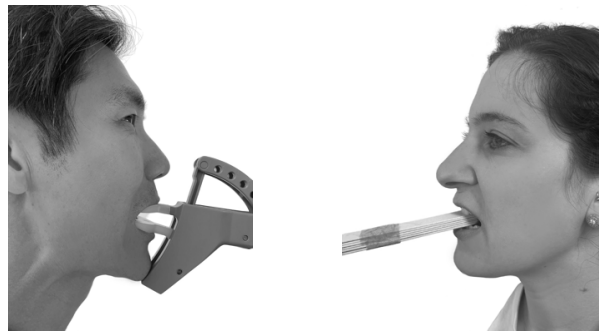
Gently move your jaw side to side and up and down. Do this about 10 times.

Measuring Mouth Opening



You should measure your mouth opening before and after the exercises that follow and keep track of your progress. Do this by measuring the space between your upper and lower teeth (or gum-line if you do not have teeth).

Stretching Mouth Opening



If you were given a Therabite, gently squeeze the lever down as far as you can and hold for 7-10 seconds and release. If you were not given a Therabite you can stack popsicle sticks to maximally stretch your jaw in a similar way. Use a rubber band to hold them together and add popsicle sticks to the middle one-by-one. Keep track of the number of popsicle sticks used.