

Following Shoulder Surgery

Information and advice for patients

Pharmacy

This leaflet has been designed to give you some important information following your shoulder surgery, with particular attention to your rehabilitation.

Symptoms to Report

Signs of infection

Some redness and swelling is expected after surgery but if you develop one or more of the following symptoms then please contact your GP or the surgical day unit as soon as possible:

- Increase in swelling and redness around your wound that you do not think is part of the normal healing of your wound.
- It feels hot.
- Discharge of green or yellow fluid from the wound.
- You generally feel unwell or have a fever (temperature higher than 38°C).

Other Information

Wearing a Sling

Following your shoulder surgery you may need to wear a sling. The Medical Team will tell you how long you will need to wear it. This can vary between a few days and 6 weeks. If you are wearing a sling, it is still important to complete exercises and your physiotherapist will advise you on which exercises you can begin. It is also important to look after your personal hygiene whilst wearing the sling by ensuring you are washing and drying your arm and under your arm.

Pain Relief

After your surgery, your shoulder may be sore and you will likely be given painkillers. If the painkillers you have been given are not sufficient, please contact the surgical day unit or your GP. Ice packs or a cold compression may also help with pain. Wrap frozen peas or crushed ice in a damp, cold cloth and place on the shoulder for up to 15 minutes.

Sleeping

Sleeping can be uncomfortable for the first few weeks, especially if you usually lie on your operated side. Lying on your back or on the non-operated side and using pillows to help support the operated shoulder may help. Although understandably difficult, it is important to still wear the sling at night in bed.

Working

You should have been given a sick note by the hospital if required after your surgery. The length of this sick note will depend on a number of factors including, the type of surgery and the work you perform. For any concerns, please liaise with the surgical day unit team using the contact details below or your own GP.

Driving

Your surgeon will advise you when you can start driving again but it will be a minimum of six weeks or after your sling is removed entirely. Your physiotherapist will be able to provide guidance on when you may be able to start with a short journey but it is your responsibility to ensure you are in control of the vehicle at all times.

Day-to-day

Following your surgery, you may initially find it difficult to feed, dress, cook and wash. Your physiotherapist may be able to advise on how best to do these activities.

Hobbies

It is important to discuss returning to your usual activities with your surgeon and physiotherapist as it will depend on the surgery you have had and the type of activity you would like to return to. Generally, it is 6 to 12 weeks before you can return to activities such as swimming and golf. For contact sports such as football, rugby, racquet sports and martial arts it is 12 weeks or more before you are able to return.

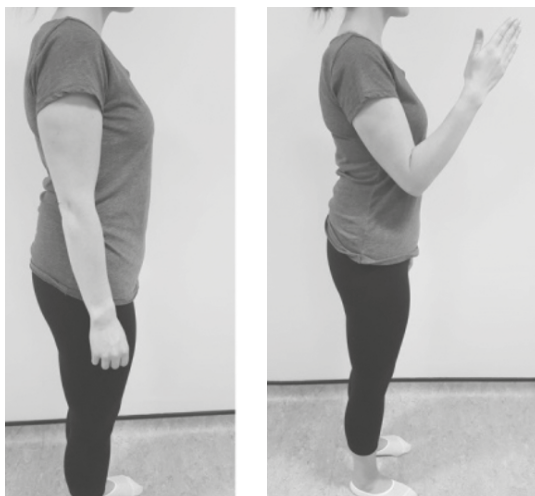
Benefits/Risks of Exercise

Following your operation, it is helpful to perform the 2 exercises below to help prevent stiffness at the elbow and wrist. It is essential that when performing these exercises the shoulder is not moved.

You can start the exercises straight away, and they should be performed a few times a day.

Elbow Flexion/Extension

You can do this exercise standing or sitting. Start with your hands relaxed and straight down by your side. Bend your elbow by turning the palm of your hand towards you and then straighten your elbow. Repeat this movement.



Wrist Flexion/Extension

With your forearm supported, bend and straighten your wrist, keeping your fingers straight. Repeat this movement.



©2021, Sandwell & West Birmingham NHS Trust.

Next Steps

An outpatient physiotherapy appointment at your preferred hospital will be booked for you. If you have not had a letter or telephone call confirming this appointment within two weeks, please call us using the contact details below.

Contact Details

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact us on one of the following numbers:

MSK Physiotherapy Service

0121 507 2664, option 3,3

Hospital Switchboard

0121 553 3801, ask for the operator

Further information

Shoulderdoc

www.shoulderdoc.co.uk

(Website accessed 12 March 2026).

Sources used for information in this leaflet

UK Health Security Agency (2022). *Monitoring surgical wounds for infection*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526979/Monitoring_surgical_wounds_for_infection_Leaflet.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2026).

Images created and supplied, with permission by the Physiotherapy Department, Sandwell & West Birmingham NHS Trust.

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact SWB Library Services on ext 3587 or email swbh.library@nhs.net.



A Teaching Trust of The University of Birmingham

Incorporating the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital, City Health Campus, Sandwell Health Campus and Rowley Regis Hospital.

© Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

ML6551

Issue Date: April 2026

Review Date: April 2029