



# Activity to reduce your risk of lymphoedema



## Physical activity and exercise

Exercise is essential for your lymphatic system. It works your muscles, and this increases the flow of lymph fluid away from any swollen areas. Try to introduce deep breathing into your daily routine because it improves circulation and gets your lymph fluid flowing.

Be as active as you can. Try to aim for **30 minutes of exercise 5 to 7 days a week.**

Begin slowly and build up gradually. Find activities that you enjoy. It is important to gradually increase your exercises after your treatment or surgery. Listen to your body and take one day at a time.

Exercise will make you feel less tired during treatment and after surgery. Exercise will also help to improve your sense of wellbeing.

**Here is a guide to how you could start to build up to 30 minutes.**

**Week 1** 5-10 min of brisk walking, daily

**Week 2** 10-15 min of brisk walking, daily

**Week 3** 15-20 min of brisk walking, daily

**Week 4** 20-25 min of brisk walking, daily

**Week 5** 25-30 min of brisk walking, daily

**Week 6** 30 min of brisk walking, daily

Ask your physiotherapist for specific arm and leg exercises you can start after your treatment or surgery. Tell them immediately if you notice any swelling in your arm or leg.

## Types of physical activity

Physical activity can be 'planned' or 'unplanned'.

- 'Planned activities' include things such as going for a walk, dancing, running, cycling, yoga, football and swimming.
- 'Unplanned activity' includes doing things like housework, playing with children or grandchildren and general day-to-day tasks.
- Physical activity can be enjoyed alone, with family or as part of a group.
- Moving more can have important health benefits. Any activity is better than none!
- Setting goals can help you to become more active and to continue with your physical recovery.





## Common reasons we don't get active and solutions

### "I don't have time"

- Start with sessions of 10 minutes
- Try to build it into your normal day (you could go for a walk at lunchtime, get off the bus a few stops early, and take the stairs instead of the lift)

### "There are no facilities near me"

- Look up outdoor walks in your area
- Look at the websites at the end of this page for more ideas
- Find an exercise or yoga class online or get an exercise DVD
- Think about what other activities you can do, like climbing stairs

### "I don't feel like it"

- Ask a friend to join you or join an exercise group
- Try keeping an exercise diary or step counter
- Set goals for yourself!

### "I'm too tired"

- Start small with 5 minute walks and build up gradually
- Remember that exercise can increase your energy levels over time



## Useful resources in the community



HSE Get Ireland Active  
[getirelandactive.ie](http://getirelandactive.ie)



Healthy Ireland  
[healthyireland.ie](http://healthyireland.ie)



Get Ireland Walking  
[getirelandwalking.ie](http://getirelandwalking.ie)



Lymphoedema Ireland  
[lymphoedemaireland.com](http://lymphoedemaireland.com)



Go for Life  
[ageandopportunity.ie](http://ageandopportunity.ie)



Irish Cancer Society  
[Cancer.ie](http://Cancer.ie)

## Create your own goals diary

This is a goal-setting log or diary you can copy. Use it to keep track of your progress every week.

Consistently tracking your activity will help keep you accountable. Some days you might be able to do more than others. Any activity or movement will help to prevent and treat lymphoedema

Ask your physiotherapist for specific arm and leg exercises you can start after your treatment or surgery. Tell them immediately if you notice any swelling in your arm or leg.

### Week 1

Goal:			
Day	Activity	Minutes	Total
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

## Practical tips for starting a new activity

**Try the activity** – Try doing a small amount of light activity and then rest a little. Find the level which is manageable for you – you may be more tired or have more pain the day after doing an activity so wait to see the result.

**Rest** – As you exercise and increase your level of physical activity, your body needs rest to cope with the increase in activity. It is important to alternate days between a physical activity day and rest day. This will help promote recovery as well as increase your overall function.

**Slowly increase activity** – Often people try and increase their activity levels too quickly, so if in doubt go more slowly but steadily. Slow increases in activity is important for preventing setbacks to your recovery. Going slowly will help your body to adapt to the increase in activity.

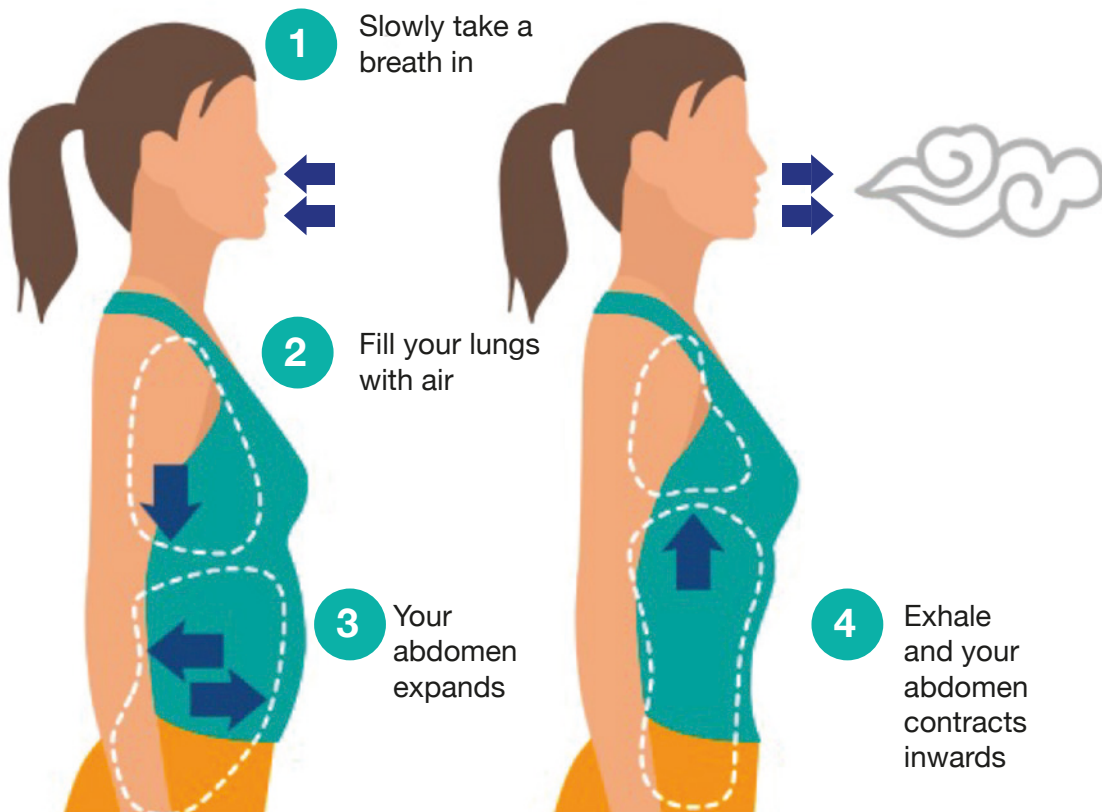
**Fun** – Don't forget to incorporate fun into your exercises. Get creative in ways to add physical activity to your daily routine. Include family and friends into your physical activity and rehab journey.



Breathing exercises and good posture are key to keeping your lymphatic flow even.

## Deep breathing exercises

(Try to do 2 to 3 deep breathes 2 or 3 times a day.)



## Posture

Immediately after surgery it may be painful to adopt an upright posture. Do your best to achieve this a few days after your surgery.

- **Stand or sit tall.**
- **Leave your arms by your side.**
- **Relax your shoulders.**
- **Bring your shoulder blades together at the back. Try correcting your posture while breathing in for 5 seconds and out for 10 seconds initially.**

