



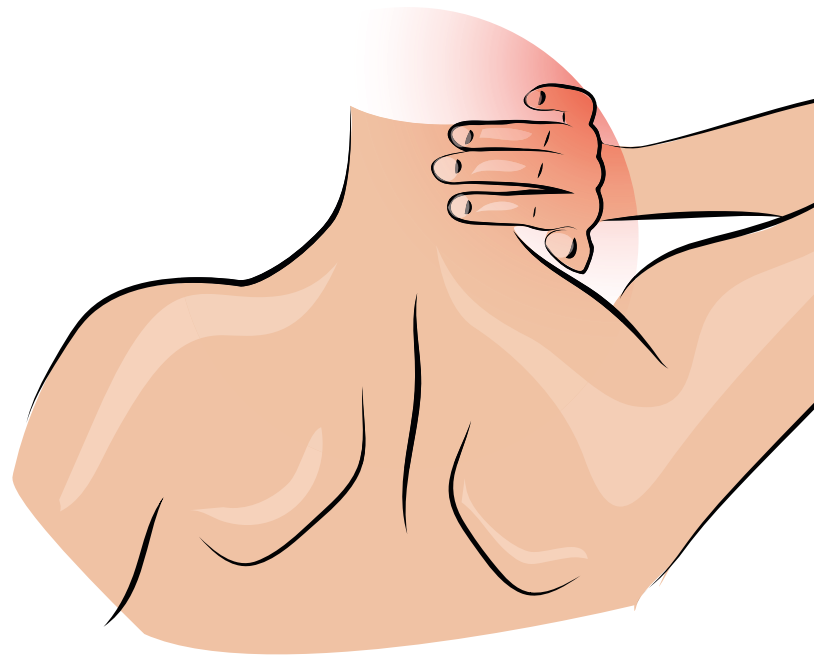
If you have had treatment for head or neck cancer, lymphoedema can happen in any part of your head, neck or face. There are a large number of lymph nodes in these areas.

Lymphoedema can happen after cancer treatment because parts of your lymphatic system have been removed or harmed by surgery or radiation. Also, scar tissue from these treatments can change how your lymph system works.

Swelling from surgery normally goes away quite quickly. But if it lasts more than 6 weeks, you may need treatment to bring it down.

Lymphoedema can occur after treatment and can happen inside your mouth or airway or on the outside your head, neck or face.

- **Internal lymphoedema** can happen anywhere inside your body, such as your mouth, tongue, larynx (voice box), airway and throat.
- **External lymphoedema** can happen in your neck and face and can affect your lips, nose, eyelids and ears. You can have either internal or external lymphoedema, or both.



**If you experience any of these symptoms, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or physio and ask to be referred to a lymphoedema therapist.**

### Early signs of head and neck lymphoedema

- **Swelling in any part of your head and neck that may feel hard to the touch**
- **A feeling of tightness in your skin or muscles**
- **A restricted range of motion in your neck which is not improving after surgery**
- **Changes in your sight or hearing**
- **A change in breathing, swallowing, eating or speaking**
- **Feeling congested (stuffy nose)**
- **Pain in your ear**



# Head and neck exercises to reduce the risk of lymphoedema

Do not start your neck exercises until your scar is fully healed. Slowly increase repetitions when you are able to.

It's normal to feel your muscles and tendons stretching during the exercises. This sensation should stop soon after the exercise ends.

Perform these exercises with caution during radiotherapy and stop if you have problems with your skin. If you feel pain or stiffness in your neck and shoulder, ask your surgeon or GP for a referral for an appointment with your treating hospital's physiotherapy department.

## Turns

Stand tall, in front of a mirror if possible. Turn your head slowly from left to right, keeping your shoulders and back relaxed. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

## Chin to chest

- Standing upright, slowly move your head down so your chin touches your chest.
- Hold for 2 seconds.
- Return your head to its upright, forward-looking position.
- Repeat 5 to 10 times

## Mouth and jaw

- Open and close your mouth repeatedly, like a fish.
- Pretend to blow out the candles on a birthday cake.
- Smile. Make it bigger than life.
- Speak the vowels a, e, i, o, and u out loud, in an exaggerated manner.
- Move your jaw from side to side.
- Without tilting your head, move your lower jaw forward. Return and repeat.
- Repeat each of these activities 5 to 10 times.

## Tilts

At first, it may help to stand before a mirror for this exercise. Looking forward, slowly tilt your head to one shoulder, keeping both shoulders still. Hold for at least two seconds. Return your head to the upright position and then tilt to the opposite shoulder. Hold for at least two seconds. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

## Shoulders

- Standing tall and upright, bring your shoulders up to your ears, then let them drop, relaxed.
- Repeat 5 to 10 times.

**Adjust pillows or bed so that your face is higher than your heart. Gentle, exercises, such as those in a “gentle yoga” class, may improve your mobility, reduce pain and help instil a sense of calm.**