

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

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# Physiotherapy Service

## Cording after breast surgery

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The aim of this leaflet is to explain what cording is and to describe some practical steps you can try to help ease its symptoms.

### What is cording?

Cording is thought to occur as a result of the lymph glands and lymph channels being removed from your axilla region or armpit.

It often shows itself as a palpable, tight and painful band of tissue (like a cord - hence the name) running down the arm towards the hand. You may even be able to feel raised "cords", which can restrict movement in your arm. The pain of cording can settle in a few weeks or can last for several months.

### Practical steps to help cope with cording

There are no clear treatment guidelines in dealing with cording. However, through experience the following have been shown to be helpful:

#### 1. Heat therapy

Often cording can make the lymph vessels feel inflamed and tight. The body can respond well to gentle heat to relax not only the lymph vessels but also the surrounding muscles and soft tissue. A gently heated wheat bag or hot water bottle (no warmer than you would have bath water) can be helpful.

Wrap the bag/bottle in a towel and place on the affected area for 10 minutes maximum.

**Please note that you have changes in skin sensation following your surgery, so be careful not to have the heated item too hot. It is important to regularly check your skin to avoid burns. Your therapist can offer you individual advice below if necessary:**

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#### 2. Massage

Gentle massage can be helpful. Apply a gentle pressure in a circular movement along the cordlike band, starting at the point closest to your chest and working down the arm. Spend 5 to 10 minutes doing this, twice a day, with an aqueous based cream, for example E45.

#### 3. Strengthening and keeping functional

Try to use your arm as normal. Slowly increasing activities at home will help to free the 'cording' and maintain the strength in your arm. Your physiotherapist may also set you some daily exercises.

#### 4. Stretches

The following gentle stretches can help to release the 'cording'. Your physiotherapist will show you how to perform them and advise how many and how often. The stretches may be easier after a warm bath and massage to the cords.

You may feel a popping sensation as the vessels free themselves. This should not be painful but can sometimes be uncomfortable.

#### **Exercise 1:**

- Link your hands, palms away from the body; straighten arms as far as possible.
- Breathe in as you slowly lift your arms up above your head until you feel a stretch. Breathe out and see if you can go a little higher.
- Slowly bring your arms back down.
- Repeat ..... times.



#### **Exercise 2:**

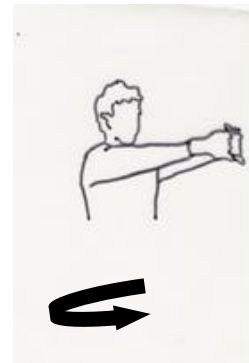
- As with exercise one, but this time, as you breathe out slowly, lean your arms to one side until you feel a stretch.
- Slowly return to the centre and repeat to the other side.
- Repeat ..... times.



#### **Exercise 3:**

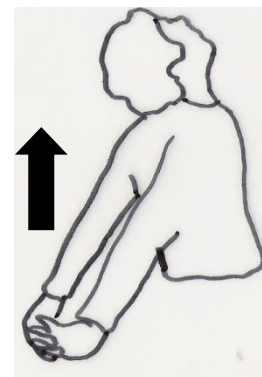
- As with exercise 1, but straighten your arms as far as you can in front of you.
- Twist from the waist until you feel a stretch.

- Slowly return to the centre and repeat to the other side.
- Repeat ..... times.



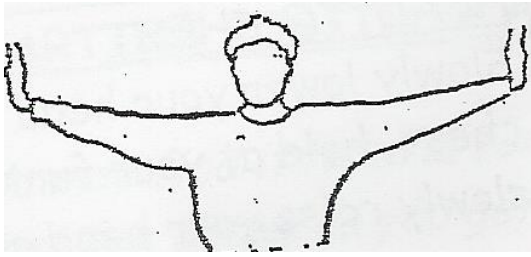
#### **Exercise 4:**

- Link your hands behind your back, palms away from the body, straighten your arms.
- Breathe in and raise your arms until you feel a stretch, lean back slightly.
- Breathe out and see if you can go a little higher.
- Slowly bring your arms back down.
- Repeat .... times.



#### **Exercise 5:**

- Lift your arms out to the side, straighten your elbows.
- Pull your hands up until you feel a stretch, hold for a few seconds, then push your hands down until you feel a stretch hold for a few seconds.
- Repeat ..... times gradually lifting your arms higher each time.



Try to do the stretches ..... times a day.

### Individual advice:

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### Your questions

You may find it useful to write down any questions to ask your therapist as you think of them. A space for this has been left below:

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### Contact details

Therapist name: .....

Physiotherapy Service, Clinic 10  
King's Mill Hospital  
Telephone: 01623 672384

### Further sources of information

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)  
Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet, please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927

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