



The Oesophageal Patients Association

Caring for the cancer patient and their family

GUIDANCE - AFTER THE OPERATION

THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

You will start moving about soon after the operation, usually with the help of a physiotherapist. This is a very important part in your recovery. Initially, moving around will be challenging and you will need help to carry your drains, urinary catheter and drip stand.

However, day by day this will improve as some of these attachments are removed and you start to feel more comfortable and confident. You will be encouraged to walk further each day. By the time you go home you will be independently mobile and able to wash and dress yourself. Wear comfortable, loose clothing that does not rub on our wounds and is easy to put on and take off. It is recommended that you increase your activity levels over a number of weeks. Building up your activity during this period should be approached by increasing speed or distance – not both. You may find it helpful to keep an activity diary. Bear in mind that outdoor walking is more difficult – there may be slopes/wind and heavier clothing to wear – and do not forget the return journey! Some days will be better than others. Set yourself realistic short term goals.

It is not recommended that you do any heavy lifting until you are reviewed by your surgical team. You will need help with heavier tasks such as carrying shopping, mowing the lawn, changing bedding, cleaning the bath, unloading the washing machine and vacuuming. If you feel able, light duties can be undertaken such as dusting, washing up and wiping down kitchen worktops. If you have an incision on the side of your chest please continue with the shoulder exercises that your physiotherapist taught you in the hospital. It takes several weeks for the muscle layers to heal and maintaining normal shoulder movement is important.

Exercise

Be sensible – when you feel able to start exercising, start slowly and build on this. If you are having further treatment i.e. chemotherapy and/or radio therapy, take advice from your oncology team with regards to exercise.

Swimming or walking are good exercises to start with. Do not swim if your wound is not completely healed and dry. Be careful of strenuous or weightlifting exercises. These and sports like running can be added later (up to marathon standard if you are really determined – one of our former patients has run several)