

# Reducing lymphoedema for patients having head and neck surgery and/or radiotherapy

Patient Information Series PI 78

East and North Hertfordshire **NHS**  
NHS Trust



## Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

## Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet and your hospital name band each time you attend. You must wear your name band at all times whilst in hospital.

This leaflet has been produced by professionals, patients and carers from Mount Vernon Cancer Centre who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication. All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. Details of the references used to write this information are available from the Information Team at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre.

## Reducing lymphoedema for patients having head and neck surgery/radiotherapy

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### Introduction

This leaflet has been produced as a guide to ways you can help decrease lymphoedema after your head and neck surgery/radiotherapy.

### What is lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is the name given to a build-up of fluid (called lymph). Our body's lymph system transports fluid and acts as part of our immune system, helping us fight infection. There are 100 - 200 lymph nodes in our neck and when these are damaged or removed during surgery or radiotherapy, the lymph cannot move easily.

When lymph nodes have been affected, gentle exercises can help move the lymph so it does not build-up in any one area of the body.

### How can I help reduce lymphoedema?

By doing the exercises in this leaflet you can help prevent lymphoedema. Please remember, these exercises do work, but it is important to:

- keep it simple
- do them slowly and gently

### When should I do the exercises?

It is useful to do the exercises:

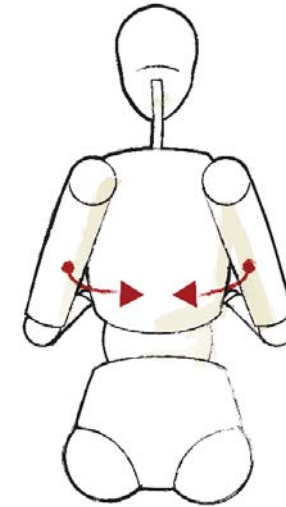
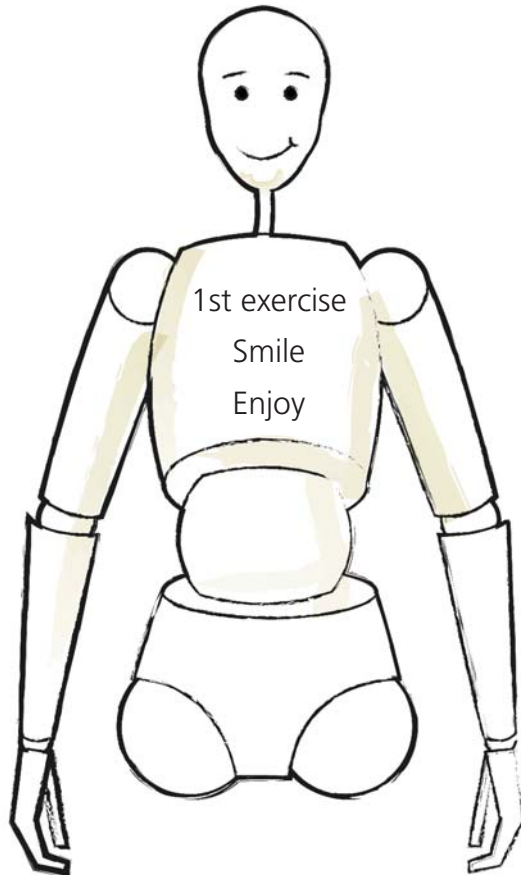
- before surgery
- straight after surgery
- before and during your radiotherapy if you can tolerate this

## How often should I do these exercise?

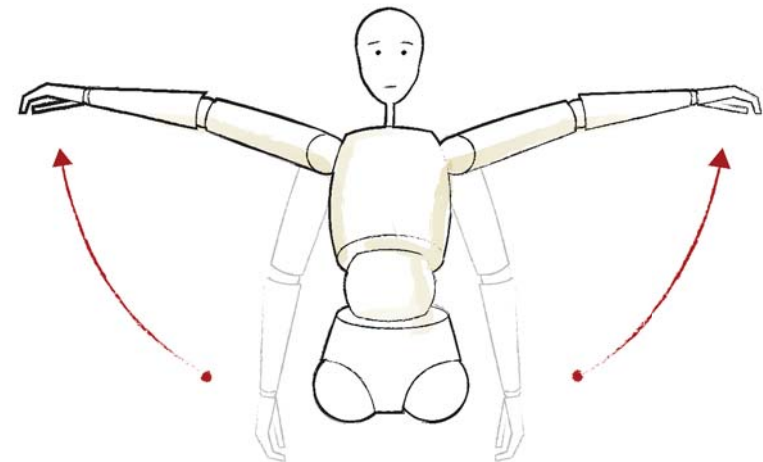
It is useful to do them:

- at least once a day, but not more than five times a day
- each exercise session should not last more than 15 minutes
- you should spend more time repeating the exercises which are difficult for you

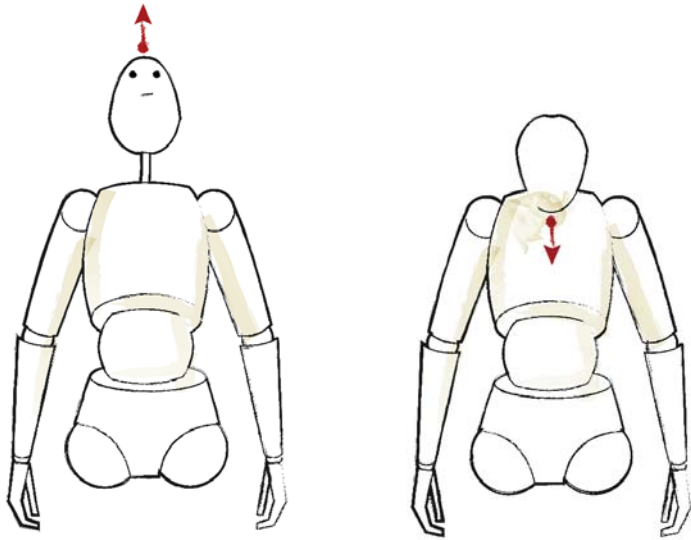
## Welcome to LYMPH-BOT



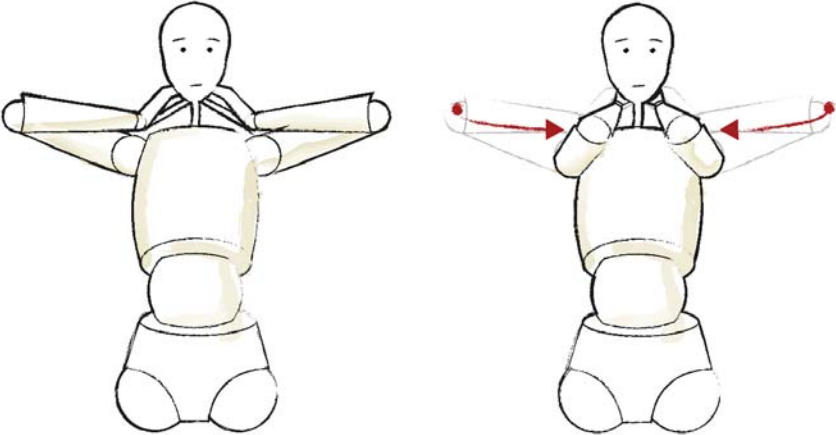
Move your  
shoulder blades  
in and out



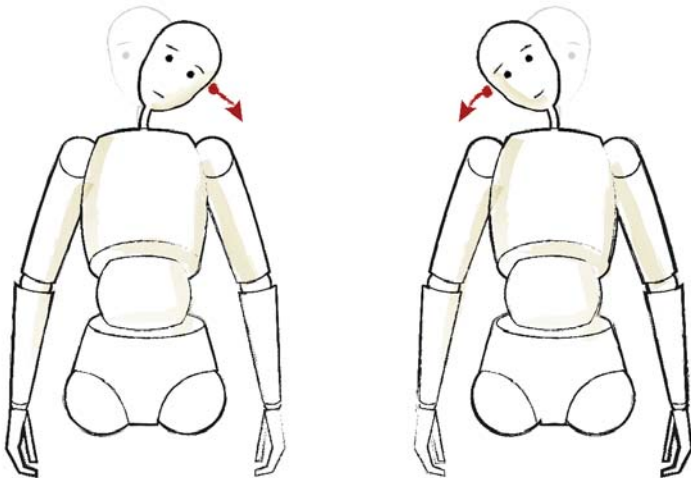
Slowly lift both your arms out sideways and  
take a deep breath at the same time  
Breathe out as you slowly lower your arms



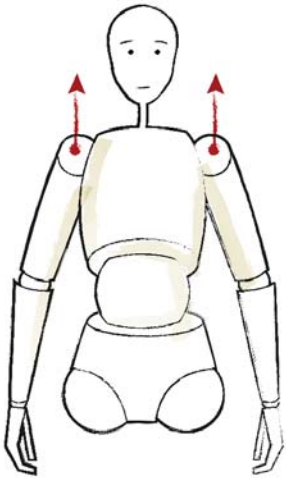
Slowly look up, then down, then rest in the centre  
Only your head and neck should move



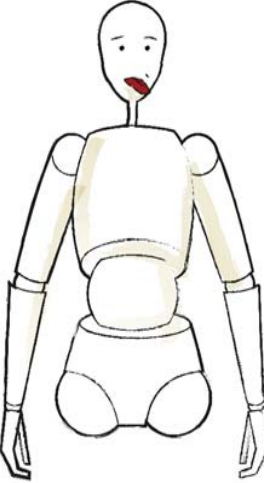
Clasp the back of your neck and bring your elbows together



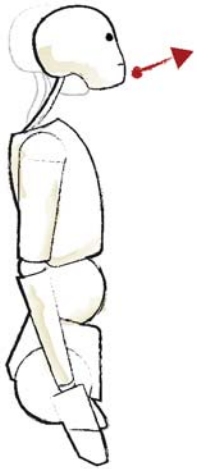
Tilt your head to the right and then the left  
Only your head should move



Shrug your shoulders up, then down



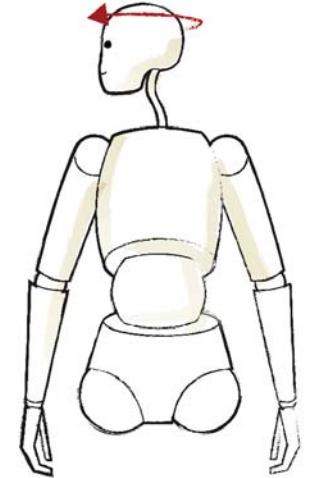
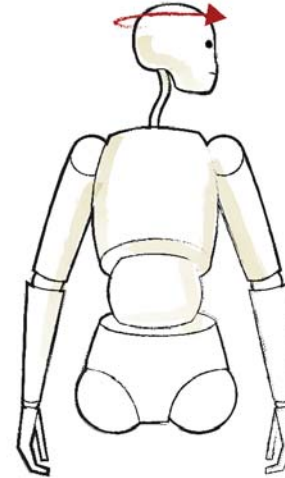
Push your tongue out to the left and then to the right



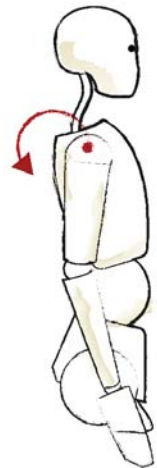
Push your chin out



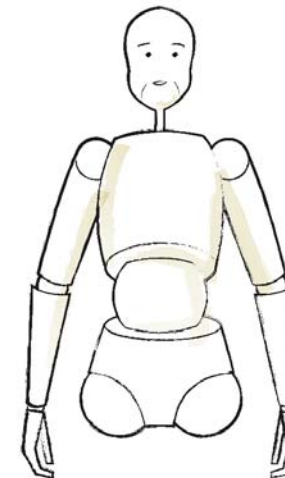
Pull your head and chin in



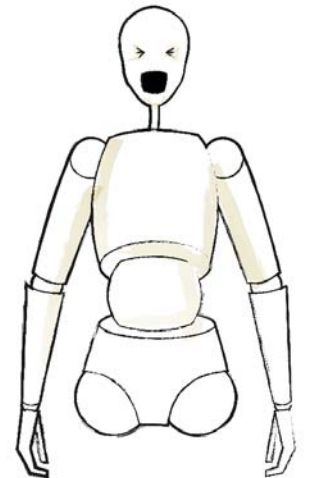
Turn your head to each side keeping your shoulders level  
Only your head should move



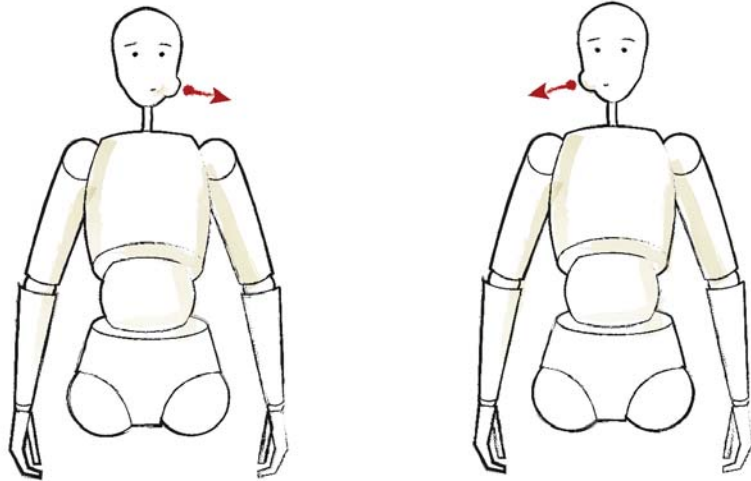
Roll your shoulders forwards in large circles 5 times, then roll them backwards 5 times  
Only your shoulder joints should move



Frown, pushing your chin down



Yawn



Push your tongue to the left and then to the right inside your cheeks

## Simple Lymphatic Drainage (SLD) exercises/ massage

Remember:

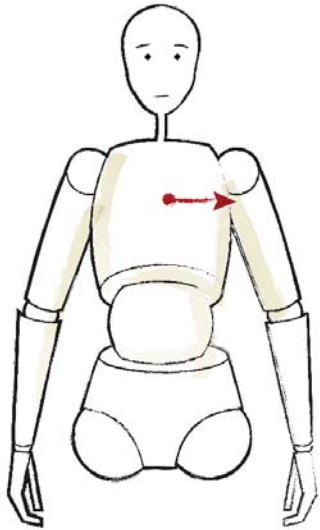
- light pressure. You should not see red marks on your skin following SLD
- start with the areas on your body that are furthest away from your head
- do these exercises/massage at least once a day
- you cannot do too much
- perform three abdominal deep breaths before and after the SLD exercises/massage.



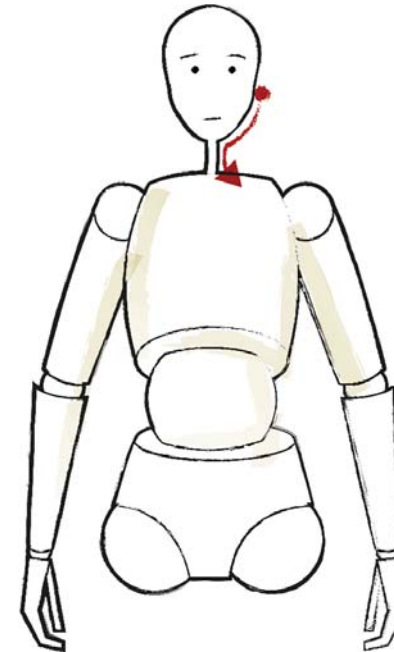
Massage each armpit with the opposite hand

Use a slow and very gentle circular motion for 30 seconds

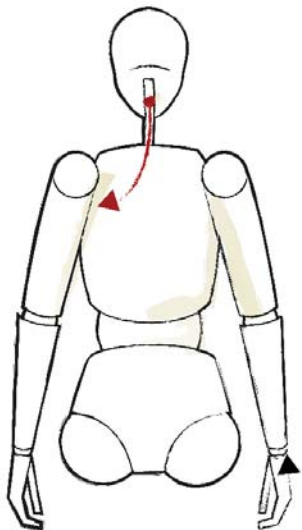
Do **not** do this SLD exercise/massage during radiotherapy or while you still have red/sore skin.



Stroke from your breast bone (sternum) to your armpit with a flat hand  
Do both sides 5 times



Use your finger pads to make gentle pressures into the hollow at the base of your neck, behind your collarbone  
Stroke from the bottom of your ear to your collar bone  
Do both sides 5 times



Stroke from the back of your neck (edge of your skull) down your back towards your armpit, using the opposite the arm  
Do both sides 5 times

## Contact

Lymphoedema clinic: 020 3826 2635

## Other help and support

The Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC) offers information and support to patients and their families and is located next to the Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. The staff at the LJMC work as part of the overall team caring for you.

People who have cancer often say that during their illness they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time. Please feel free to drop in before, during or after any of your visits to Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, to find out more about the LJMC services that you may find helpful.

The volunteers and healthcare professionals at the LJMC provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help patients cope with cancer and its treatment.

LJMC services include a range of complementary therapies, counselling, relaxation sessions and financial advice.

You can drop in without an appointment or call the LJMC helpline on 020 3826 2555. More information is on the back of this leaflet.



# Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre

support & information at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

*... supporting people affected by cancer...*

This leaflet forms part of a series of publications produced by the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

If you would like further information about any aspect of cancer and its treatments, please drop in to the centre or call the Helpline.

The LJMC is staffed by healthcare professionals and trained volunteers and is part of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

Services offered at the LJMC include:

- Drop-in centre for support and information
- Telephone helpline
- Benefits advice\*
- Complementary therapies\*
- Relaxation classes
- Counselling\*
- Look Good...Feel Better™ beauty workshops
- Self-help courses

\* These services are available to NHS patients under the care of an oncologist based at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre.

The **Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre** is situated between the Cancer Centre and Gate 3 (White Hill)

Opening hours: **Mon-Fri: 9.30am-1.00pm & 2.00-4.30pm**

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN

Telephone Helpline: **020 3826 2555**

Website: [www.ljmc.org](http://www.ljmc.org)



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