

Shoulder Surgery: Sling Use Instructions

SLING/IMMOBILIZER:

If you have had shoulder surgery, your arm may be placed in a sling. This will support the shoulder and arm, and keep your arm at your side. As long as you are wearing this, your shoulder is well protected. It is safe for you to free your hand from the sling and rotate your arm as long as you keep your elbow at your side. You may bend your elbow to reach toward your face, e.g. to brush your teeth, use a fork, etc. but you should avoid reaching higher than this until instructed.

DO NOT try to use your own muscles to move your elbow away from your side unless instructed. Please sleep with the sling on. For comfort when sleeping, lay on your back and prop a pillow behind your elbow to keep it from sagging. To wash your armpit, you may lean slightly forward and let your arm dangle slightly away from your side and wash with a washcloth.

This is relevant if you need to be in a sling for 3 to 6 weeks following your shoulder operation. You will have to follow the following precautions to protect your shoulder:

NOTE:

It is essential that you regularly loosen or release the sling to exercise and move your elbow, wrist and hand to prevent stiffness of these joints. This should be done at least 4 times per day.

1. GETTING WASHED: For the first 3 weeks you may need assistance to wash your un-operated arm, as you will not be able to use your operated arm for this. It may be possible to use either a cubicle shower, or an overbath shower. Please remember to keep the surgical wounds dry and protected whilst washing. Waterproof dressings may be worn when you are washing. To dry yourself, it may be easier to put a toweling bathrobe on, which will help to dry your un-operated arm.

2. GETTING DRESSED: You will find it easier to wear front opening clothes. Always dress your operated arm first. Sit on the edge of a chair or stand with your arm 'hanging' by your side. Slide your operated arm into the garment first using your un-operated arm. Do not assist with your operated arm, just let it hang loose. Once this arm is fully in the sleeve bring the garment around your back and put the other arm in. Any fasteners must be fastened only with your un-operated arm. Once you have dressed your upper body, place your arm back in the sling. **(See images below)**



By 6 weeks after your operation you be able to have returned to dressing 'normally'.

3. FEEDING: For the first **3 weeks** after your operation, you will feed yourself with your **un-operated** hand only. After this time you may return to feeding yourself 'normally' using both hands.

4. TRANSFERING: This means getting in and out of your chair, bed and bath and getting on and off your toilet. For the first 6 weeks you must only push up from the bed, chair, toilet and bath using your un-operated arm. **After 6 weeks** you may return to using both arms as pain allows.

5. SLEEPING: For the first **6 weeks** your sling should be kept on while you are in bed. You may find it more comfortable to sleep on your back initially, with a pillow under your **operated** arm for support. You may also find it more comfortable to sleep in a semi-sitting position.



6. KITCHEN ACTIVITIES: This includes making meals, snacks and drinks for yourself. For the first **6 weeks** you must use your un-operated arm for kitchen activities. After this time you may return to using both arms. **AVOID LIFTING ANYTHING HEAVY FOR 3 MONTHS.** At **6 weeks** after surgery you may lift light items.



7. HOUSEWORK: Light housework may resume after **6 weeks**. More strenuous housework should be avoided until 3 months after your operation.

8. STAIRS: When climbing/descending the stairs, hold the railing with your un-operated arm. After 6 weeks you may hold the railing with either arm.