**Surgical Arm Reach**
Hold your surgical arm straight beside your body. Slowly raise your arm as high as possible over your head while keeping your elbow straight. Hold the position for a few seconds. Repeat six times.

**Range of Motion**
Hold a stick with your surgical hand palm up and your non-surgical arm palm down. Push your surgical arm directly out from your side toward the ceiling until you feel a stretch. Hold this position for several seconds. Repeat six times.

**Surgical Arm Swing**
Place your non-surgical arm on a table to support your body. Put your surgical arm across your chest, placing your hand on the opposite shoulder. Move the surgical arm slowly away from your body until it is extended straight. Keep your arm at shoulder level as you perform the exercise. Repeat six times.

**Surgical Arm Circles**
- Lean on a table with your non-surgical arm. Move your surgical arm in a circle clockwise and then counter-clockwise. Repeat six times.
- Lean on the table as in the previous exercise, swing your surgical arm from side to side six times.

If you are having difficulty performing the exercises and feel you are not making progress, tell your surgeon. Some women need the assistance of a physical therapist to regain complete range of motion or they may need the motivation of an exercise group led by a professional to restore the range of motion in the surgical arm.

After breast surgery, it is not uncommon for some women to favor use of their non-surgical arm and become "one armed" as they resume their daily activities. Weakness in the surgical arm, which most women experience to some degree, will cause this to happen. However, it is helpful if you remember that using the surgical arm regularly will gradually increase strength and range of motion.

**Range of Motion Assessment**
After having performed these exercises for several months following your surgery, ask the following questions to determine whether you have adequate return of motion in your arm.

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**Full Range of Motion Exercises**
Finally, with both of your arms straight by your side, raise both hands above your head and hold the position for several seconds. Repeat six times. This exercise will be one of the last you master and will be proof that your surgical arm has regained range of motion.

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**Understanding Lymphedema**
Removal of the lymph nodes under your surgical arm, or radiation therapy to the underarm area, may cause a swelling called lymphedema. (Lymph, from lymphatic fluid—edema, swelling from fluid accumulation). This condition results in swelling from the slowed-down flow and removal of lymphatic fluid from your arm. Only a small percentage of women experience lymphedema after healing from surgery, but all women need to know of the potential and treatment if it should occur. It can happen anytime from shortly after surgery to years later and is not caused by cancer but by lymph node removal.

The first line of defense against lymphedema is regaining full range of motion of your arm, using the suggested exercises in this brochure or from your healthcare provider. While these exercises may seem dull and unnecessary, they serve to facilitate the flow of the lymphatic fluid from the arm area.
**Steps to Avoid Injury and Infection:**
- Do not allow the surgical arm to be used for blood pressure readings, blood samples or injections.
- Do not wear anything that is tight on the arm or hand, such as rings, watches, bracelets or tight elastic in sleeves.
- Do not hold a cigarette in this hand.
- Do not cut your cuticles; keep hands soft by using hand lotion regularly. Avoid nail salons that use electric files or drills.
- Do not carry heavy packages or purses on the side of your surgery.
- Wear protective gloves when working in the garden, washing dishes or using any irritating chemicals such as hair dye or cleaning products.
- Avoid burns and cuts when cooking.
- Wash all cuts or injuries with an anti-bacterial soap, apply an anti-bacterial medication and cover the area with sterile gauze or a BandAid® until the wound heals.
- Avoid sunburn. Wear long sleeves or sunscreen at all times when in direct sunlight for a period of time.
- Use a thimble when sewing.
- Avoid insect bites by wearing insect repellent.
- Be careful with animals to avoid scratches.
- Use an electric razor under your arm.
- If traveling by air, ask your healthcare provider about obtaining a prescription for an elastic compression sleeve.

**When to Notify Healthcare Provider:**
If you experience any sudden swelling, redness, pain, infection, run a low-grade fever or have problems moving your arm, notify your healthcare provider immediately.

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**Exercise and Care of the Surgical Arm**

"IT'S TIME TO PLACE YOURSELF IN TRAINED HANDS... YOUR OWN."

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**After surgery for breast cancer,** your surgical arm needs to be exercised to restore normal range of motion. Your healthcare provider will inform you of the appropriate time to begin an exercise program. Most healthcare providers prefer that all drains, sutures or staples be removed before you attempt an exercise routine.

Restoring full range of motion and regaining full use of all the muscles are accomplished by gradually increasing the movements of the arm using exercises such as the ones described below.

**When you begin an exercise program, you may find that you tire easily and that there may be some discomfort as you attempt to perform the movements. However, continue to perform the exercises to the point of slight discomfort but not until it becomes painful. It may take several weeks before you are able to complete some of the exercises. Work at your own pace. Your progress will be gradual.**

Some women find that the routine is less uncomfortable if they take pain medication (aspirin, Advil® or Tylenol®) an hour before starting or if they take a warm shower just prior to beginning the exercises.

**Exercise Schedule**
Exercises should be performed on a regular basis, preferably two or more sessions a day, ten to fifteen minutes each session. Persistence is the key to regaining complete range of motion. Do the exercises slowly and hold the position when you get to the end of the range. This helps stretch and strengthen the muscle.

Some exercises require a small rubber ball to squeeze and a broom handle or yardstick to hold in your hand. Many of the exercises may be performed either standing or sitting down. (The “surgical arm” is the term that will refer to the arm on the side of your surgery and the “non-surgical arm” is the opposite arm.)

**Surgical Arm Raises**
Clench a rubber ball in your surgical hand with your elbow bent. Slowly lift your arm toward your head. Keep your elbow away from your body as you lift the ball toward your head. Hold your position for a few seconds when you reach your head. Repeat six times.

**Surgical Arm Lifts**
Lift your surgical arm away from your side toward the ceiling with your palm turned forward. Raise your arm as high as possible and hold it there for a few seconds. Repeat six times.

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