Breast surgery can affect your arm movements. Many women with breast cancer have some kind of surgery, even though other kinds of treatment are done, too. Any of these can affect how well you can move your shoulder and arm, take a deep breath, or perform daily activities, such as dressing, bathing, and combing your hair. Pain and stiffness can cause weakness and limit movement of your arm and shoulder. Exercises can help restore movement. No matter what type of surgery you have, it’s important to do exercises to get the arm and shoulder moving again. Exercise helps to decrease side effects of your surgery and helps you get back to your usual activities.

If you’ve had radiation therapy after surgery, exercises are even more important to help keep your arm and shoulder flexible. Radiation may affect your arm and shoulder long after treatment is finished. Because of this, it’s important to develop a regular habit of doing exercises to maintain arm and shoulder mobility after radiation treatments for breast cancer.

It’s very important to talk with your doctor before starting any exercise so that you can decide on a program that’s right for you. Your doctor might suggest you see a physical therapist or occupational therapist, or a cancer exercise specialist certified by the American College of Sports Medicine. These health professionals are specially trained to design an exercise program just for you. You might need this kind of help if you don’t have full use of your arm within three to four weeks of surgery.

Some exercises shouldn’t be done until drains and sutures (stitches) are removed. But some exercises can be done soon after surgery. Exercises that increase your shoulder and arm motion can usually be started in a few days, and exercises to help make your arm stronger are added later. The exercises described here can be done as soon as your doctor says it’s alright. They’re usually started a week or more after surgery. Be sure to talk to your doctor before trying any of them. Here are some things to keep in mind after breast surgery:

• Wear comfortable, loose clothing when doing the exercises.
• Do the exercises slowly until you feel a gentle stretch. You shouldn’t feel pain as you do them, only gentle stretching.
• Do each exercise five to 10 times. Try to do each exercise correctly.
• Be sure to take deep breaths, in and out, as you do each exercise.
The human body moves three dimensionally. All muscles react, and all joints move three dimensionally. The following six movements help to promote improvements in everyday movements and activities as well as counterbalance what you may be doing too much of. Listen to your body and move in a range comfortable for you.

**Forward Lunge with Overhead Reach**

Take a step forward with the left leg. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms overhead. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level. (Lift chest, arms stop at ears. Feel in the abdominals and hip flexor, NEVER in LOWBACK)

**Posterior Lunge with Ankle Reach**

Take a step back with the right leg. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms down to right ankle. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level. (PRESS hips back; feel in gluteus and hamstring, NEVER in LOWBACK)

**Same Side Lunge with Overhead Lateral Reach**

Take a step out to the side with left leg. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms overhead to the right side. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level.
Opposite Side Lunge with Overhead Opposite Side Lateral Reach

Take a step with the left leg in front of body to the right side. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms overhead to the right. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level.

Same Side Rotation Lunge with Same Side Rotational Reach at Shoulder (arms follow moving leg)

Take a step with the left leg, turning to the left. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms at shoulder height in the same direction. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level.

Opposite Side Rotation Lunge with Opposite Side Rotational Reach at Shoulder (arms follow moving leg)

Take a step with the left leg crossing in front, turning to the right. Allow the hips to follow along. Reach the arms at shoulder height to the right. Repeat on the other side. Gauge speed, length and depth of step to fitness level.