

# EXERCISE & STRETCHING

Exercise and stretching are important to reduce the risk of lymphedema, manage it if it occurs, and maintain function and range of motion in the head and neck. Exercise helps lymphedema in two ways. First, as the muscles contract and apply pressure to the tissue in the head and neck, lymph fluid is moved along to other areas where it can drain properly. Second, as your blood circulates, it helps to remove excess fluid. Make sure you discuss with your medical team which exercises are best for you—never begin an exercise regimen without talking to your doctor.

## AEROBIC ACTIVITY

Many patients will benefit from aerobic activity, such as walking or swimming or biking. 20-30 minutes per day on most days of the week offers the most benefit. Be sure to include a 5-minute warm-up and a 10-minute cool down!

## STRETCHING

There are many exercises designed specifically to aid head and neck lymphedema. While you may have the sensation of stretching while doing these exercises, you should not feel pain. If an exercise is painful, stop doing it and discuss this with your medical team. Stretching exercises have the most benefit when done once or twice every day. Try to do 10 repetitions of each exercise, and focus on moving slowly and carefully.

### Neck

#### Head Turns:

1. Turn your head as far as you can, so you're looking over your shoulder.
2. Hold this position for 2 seconds.
3. Slowly turn your head back so you're facing forward.
4. Repeat this movement on the other side.
5. Be sure to keep your shoulders relaxed and in their natural position.

#### Head Tilt:

1. Tilt your head toward your shoulder until you feel a stretch on the opposite side.
2. Hold this position for 2 seconds.
3. Slowly straighten up.
4. Repeat this movement on the other side.
5. Be sure to keep your shoulders relaxed and in their natural position.

#### Neck Bend:

1. Bend your head toward your chest as far as you can, trying to touch your chin to your chest.
2. Hold this position for 2 seconds.
3. Slowly lift your head back up.

### Shoulder

#### Shoulder Lift:

1. Start with your shoulders in a relaxed position.
2. Raise your shoulders up to your ears.
3. Hold this position for 2 seconds.
4. Slowly lower them back down.

#### Shoulder Rotation:

1. Start with your shoulders in a relaxed position.
2. Rotate your shoulders forward.
3. Then slowly rotate them backwards.

### Mouth & Jaw

The following are some movements that help you stretch the muscles in and around the mouth:

1. Open your mouth as wide as is comfortable, and then slowly close it.
2. Pretend to blow out a candle.
3. Make and hold an exaggerated smile for 2 seconds.

The following movements help you stretch the muscles in and around the jaw:

1. Slide your lower jaw one way. Then slide it the other way.
2. Move your lower jaw forward. Relax, and repeat.

For more information on exercise, visit [here](https://www.headandneck.org/survivorship-education-videos/) or [headandneck.org/survivorship-education-videos/](https://www.headandneck.org/survivorship-education-videos/).

For a video tutorial on these and other exercises, visit [here](https://bit.ly/39TQIPX) or <https://bit.ly/39TQIPX>.



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