

## Breast Surgery and Shoulder Pain

Dr Beth Shelly PT, DPT, WCS, BCB PMD

The shoulder is a very complex joint with many muscles in the front and back. Several of these muscles (primarily the pectoralis group) are located under the breast and attached to the front of your shoulder. Any breast surgery (reduction, augmentation/implants, or mastectomy) has the potential to upset the shoulder and neck; sometimes resulting in decreased motion and pain.

Try these exercises on both sides and compare tightness and strength.

- 1) Tip your head to the side, bringing your ear to your shoulder. This stretches the muscles on the top of the shoulder.
- 2) Turn your head all the way to the right, then all the way to the left.
- 3) Squeeze the shoulder blades together and back. This is important for everyone, especially if the upper back or neck are painful.
- 4) Face the wall and slide your hand up the wall. Step close to the wall and reach up as high as possible. Mark the height and compare from right to left.
- 5) Reach your arm behind your back and up towards your head. Compare how high you can reach from right to left.

These exercises can give you an idea of how much difference there is from the surgical to the non-surgical side. Gentle consistent exercises often helps restore movement and strength. Some shoulder pain requires individual instruction in exercise and stretching. Breast surgeries often alter structures, this must be considered when prescribing specialized exercise. Physical therapist with specialized knowledge of breast surgery and rehabilitation can help.

A special note about scars: Scars in any area of the body can become tight and painful, resulting in restricted movement and limiting function. Even small scars, such as scope sites or implant scars, can have far reaching consequences. Specialized scar mobilization and stretching restores mobility and decreases pain.

Shoulder pain is not an inevitable result of breast surgery. Not all patients will achieve full shoulder range of motion and strength after breast surgery. In some cases, part of the pectoralis muscle may be removed. Physical therapy can help maximize the function of the arm and minimize pain.