

Stretching and Positioning Regime for Upper Limb

**Physiotherapy Department
Community & Therapy Services**

This leaflet has been designed to remind you of the exercises you have been taught, the correct techniques and who to contact with any queries.

Information for patients and visitors

Muscle Tone

Muscle tone is an unconscious low level contraction of your muscles while they are at rest. The purpose of this is to keep your muscles primed and ready to generate movement. Several neurological causes may change a person's muscle tone to increase or decrease resulting in a lack of movement.

Over time, a lack of movement can cause stiffness, pain, and spasticity. In severe cases this may also lead to contractures.

Spasticity

Spasticity can be defined as a tightening or stiffness of the muscle due to increased muscle tone. It can interfere with normal functioning. It can also greatly increase fatigue.

However, exercise, properly done, is vital in managing spasticity.

The following tips may prove helpful:

- Avoid positions that make the spasticity worse
- Daily stretching of muscles to their full length will help to manage the tightness of spasticity, and allow for optimal movement
- Moving a tight muscle to a new position may result in an increase in spasticity. If this happens, allow a few minutes for the muscles to relax
- When exercising, try to keep head straight
- Sudden changes in spasticity may occur in the presence of infections, skin sores, or even tight shoes or clothing

Information for patients and visitors

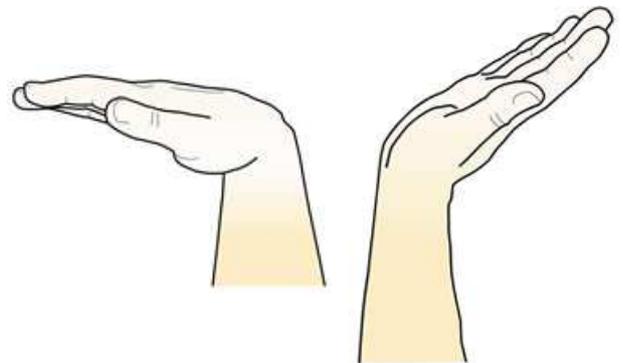
Common Patterns

Common positions include:

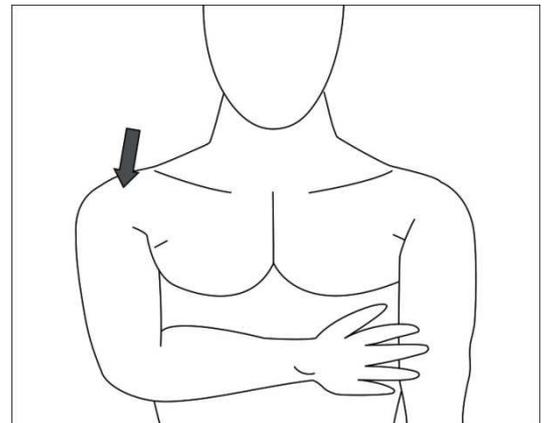
- Fingers flexed into a fist
- Thumb flexed into palm



- Wrist flexed with or without finger flexion
- Wrist extended with or without finger extension



- Arm held across body
- Elbow flexion
- Shoulder may also appear lower on one side



Information for patients and visitors

Positioning

Sitting

If the arm hangs down when sitting or standing and has no movement then the hands and fingers can become swollen. This can lead to pain when the fingers are moved.

To help avoid this, the arm should be rested on a pillow or table. This can also help to provide additional support for a tight upper limb encouraging relaxation.

It is important to ensure that the elbow, hand and wrist are maintained in as neutral a position as possible without restraining the patient.



Lying

If the arm is trapped or in an uncomfortable position and has no movement this can lead to pain, swelling and pressure damage.

To help avoid this ensure that the arm is in as neutral a position as possible. Pillows can be used to assist with this.

It is important to ensure that the elbow, hand and wrist are maintained in as neutral a position as possible without restraining the patient.



Standing

Supportive slings may be provided if clinically relevant and will be identified by the relevant health professionals prior to use.

If you have any concerns in regards to positioning seek the advice of the relevant health professional.

Information for patients and visitors

Precautions to the Stretching Regime

- Wear clothing that doesn't restrict movement
- Ensure the room temperature is comfortably cool
- Don't force any movement that causes pain or increases spasticity. Some feeling of stretch is fine; pain, numbness or tingling is not
- If pain occurs, stop. Check with your health care professional before trying that move again. If discomfort occurs, cut back to a motion that's easier
- Go slowly. All movements should be done evenly, allowing the muscles time to respond to the stretch by relaxing
- Moving quickly can increase spasticity or stiffness. Hold each stretch for 30–40 seconds at the comfortable far end of your range
- It may help to count out loud or use a timer. Then gently return to the starting position
- Progress as tolerated, the body will vary from day to day. The idea is to increase the range of pain-free motion. Therefore, it's important to distinguish between pain and the feeling of stretch. Stretch is okay; pain is not
- A family member or carer may be able to help with stretching. It is important that the support partner knows what they are doing when assisting; otherwise they may be at risk to injuring the patient or themselves
- Avoid over-exertion. Include rest periods, and sip cool water to prevent over-heating or dehydration

Information for patients and visitors

Passive Stretching Programme

Repeat each exercise 10 times, gradually increasing the range of movement over time. All exercises should be completed 2-3 times daily.

Shoulder Flexion



Supporting the arm and wrist, pick the arm up and over the head to a position behind the ear or as high as tolerated by patient. Allow to return to resting position under control.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

Shoulder Abduction



Supporting the arm and wrist, pick the arm up and move out to the side towards the head or as high as tolerated by the patient taking additional care with a low tone shoulder. Allow to return to resting position under control.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

Information for patients and visitors

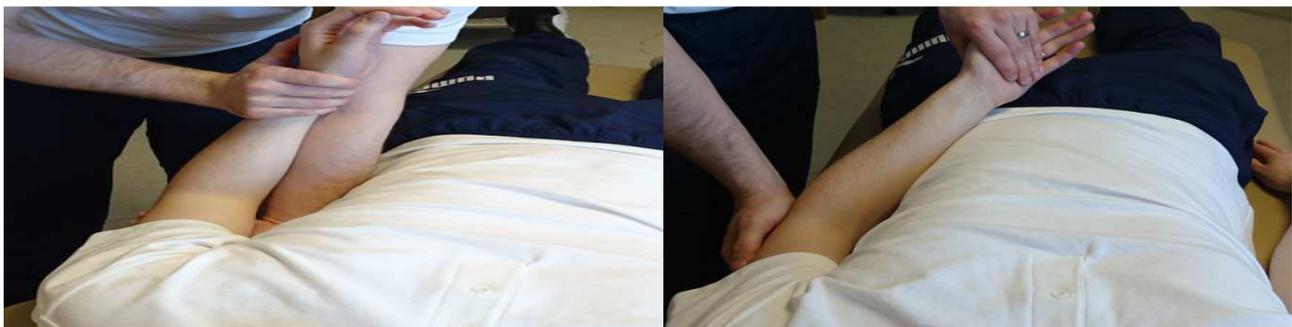
Shoulder Rotation



Supporting at the wrist and elbow take the shoulder out to the side, then rotate the arm forwards and backwards within the range available. Take particular care with a low tone shoulder.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

Elbow Flexion / Extension



Supporting at the wrist and elbow, bend the arm towards the shoulder. Keeping the same position, straighten the arm towards the bed.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

Information for patients and visitors

Elbow Pronation / Supination



Supporting the wrist and elbow, gently turn the hand and wrist outwards and inwards.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient.

Wrist Flexion / Extension



Holding the arm and hand, with the wrist straight, bend the hand forwards and backwards. Repeat with the hand in a fist position if possible.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient. Allow to return to resting position, applying any splints or supports as advised.

Information for patients and visitors

Finger Flexion / Extension



Take each finger and pull gently to touch the base of the finger and then out stretched away from the palm. Can be completed individually or together. Repeat this movement for the thumb.

Over-pressure can be applied to gently increase the stretch as tolerated by the patient. Allow to return to resting position, applying any splints or supports as advised.

Ensure patient comfort at all times and work within individual patient's limitations. If you experience any difficulties or concern ensure the relevant health care professional is consulted for advice.

Information for patients and visitors

Contact details for Further Information

Goole Physiotherapy: 03033 302385

Scunthorpe Physiotherapy: 03033 304069

Grimsby Physiotherapy: 03033 304576

Concerns and Queries

If you have any concerns / queries about any of the services offered by the Trust, in the first instance, please speak to the person providing your care.

For Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital – you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01472) 875403 or at the PALS office which is situated near the main entrance.

For Scunthorpe General Hospital – you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01724) 290132 or at the PALS office which is situated on C Floor.

Alternatively you can email:

nlq-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust

Diana Princess of Wales Hospital

Scarcho Road

Grimsby

DN33 2BA

01472 874111

Scunthorpe General Hospital

Cliff Gardens

Scunthorpe

DN15 7BH

01724 282282

Goole & District Hospital

Woodland Avenue

Goole

DN14 6RX

01405 720720

www.nlg.nhs.uk

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