

Information about ...

Exercises after burn injury of the neck

Plastics Therapy Department

Burns and Plastics Surgery Unit

Glasgow Royal Infirmary

84 Castle Street

Glasgow G4 0SF

Telephone: 0141 201 3175

Following a burn to your neck, you may experience some pain and mild swelling. This is normal but it may cause problems with work and every day activities such as eating and dressing. This leaflet will give you advice on appropriate exercises following your injury.

It is important to exercise your joints after a burn injury to prevent stiffness which can then lead to loss of function (i.e. being unable to move your neck). If there is burn damage to the skin over or near a joint it has the potential to become tight and therefore difficult to move. You could develop a contracture (i.e. the skin and muscles tighten up) which will cause lack of movement at your neck. This can happen if you do not exercise or move your neck. It is always better to prevent a contracture than to treat it.

During your treatment, your physiotherapist will give you exercises to reduce neck stiffness and improve your ability to move your neck for every day activities.

It is important that you continue these exercises at home.

Pain management

Your doctor may have prescribed pain killers. Make sure that you take these regularly. If you have not been prescribed any painkillers, take your normal pain killers regularly e.g. paracetamol, (do not exceed the daily dose). Your exercises may increase your pain as you are stretching the injured area, so make sure that you take adequate pain relief throughout the day.

Positioning

Your most comfortable position will be when you are not stretching your wound and skin. If you remain in this position, this can lead to longer term problems with restricted movement, being unable to move your neck.

The ideal position to rest in whilst your burn is healing is with your neck tilted back (so that your head rests backward). The best way to achieve this is to sit without pillows at your head as shown below.



When lying in bed, it is important not to use more than one pillow as this will sit your head forwards and your skin will become tight at the front of your neck. You should lie with either one pillow or ideally no pillows to prevent this, as shown.



You may need to wear a neck collar to maintain your neck in a good position. It has straps on it to maintain it's position. Your physiotherapist will show you how to wear it.

Scar massage

Once your burn has healed, use a plain non-perfumed moisturiser cream 2 to 3 times every day to keep the skin supple. Rub the cream firmly over your scar for approximately 5-10 minutes. This will help with your stretches.

Exercises

Repeat each exercise 10 times every 1-2 hours throughout the day. If you carry them out throughout the day, this will prevent stiffness.

It is important to do your exercises first thing in the morning as you will find that your neck will be at it's stiffest in the morning. This is because you have not been moving your neck whilst you were sleeping.

The first few exercises may be painful. This is normal and will not cause you any harm. Carry on with the exercises as they will get easier.

Exercise 1

Sitting in a supported chair, bend your neck backwards as far as you can.

With your hand, push your chin as far back as possible keeping your mouth closed while you do this exercise.

Hold this position for

_____ seconds.

Then relax your neck and repeat

_____ times.



Exercise 2

Sitting in a supported chair.

Bend your neck forwards.

Clasp your hand behind your head and bend your neck further forwards.

Hold this position for

_____ seconds.

Then relax your neck and repeat

_____ times.



Exercise 3

Sitting in a supported chair.

Turn your head to one side and aim to look over your shoulder.

Using your hand, push your head further round.

Hold this position for

_____ seconds.

Then relax your neck and repeat

_____ times.



Repeat this exercise by turning your head to the opposite side. Hold and relax as you did above.

Exercise 4

Sitting in a supported chair.

Tilt your head towards one shoulder.

Using your hand, pull your head further to the side.

Hold this position for

_____ seconds.

Then relax your neck and repeat

_____ times.



Repeat this exercise by tilting your head to the opposite side. Hold and relax as you did above.

Exercise 5

Sitting with your back straight, in a supported chair.

Pull your chin in, keeping your neck and back straight. Do not tilt your chin forwards.

Try to push your chin backwards in a straight line. You can use your hand as shown to push your chin further back.

Hold this position for

_____ seconds.



After exercising

You will find that now you have completed your exercises, your neck will feel looser. It is important to keep your neck moving between exercise sessions by using it normally or it will stiffen up between exercise sessions.

You can stop doing your exercises when exercising is easy and you can move your neck freely through the day.

This leaflet contains general information on exercise.

If you have any questions about the exercises, please speak to a physiotherapist. Or please phone the Plastics Therapy Department on **0141 201 3175**.

If your burn injury makes daily activities difficult or you need further advice, please contact the Occupational Therapist on 0141 201 3175.

