

About wearing a sling

The aim of this leaflet is to provide general advice on wearing a sling, along with some useful tips to make things as easy as possible. If you have further questions please talk to your physiotherapist or surgeon.



Background

After your surgery you may be given a sling. It is to provide support and comfort as well as protecting the surgical site to allow it to heal.

It is important you follow the specific advice given to you in regards to your sling as this can vary depending on exactly what was done at your surgery. This will be explained to you after the surgery, as well as being shown how best to put it on and how to adjust it.

Posture

When wearing a sling it is important to maintain the correct posture as this will not only help reduce pain and discomfort but will also enable your arm to sit in the correct position. Try and avoid rounding your shoulder and hunching over as this can increase stress placed on your shoulder and neck.

Sitting

Resting your arm on a pillow or cushion when seated may help take the strain off your neck.

Sleeping

It is important to wear your sling in bed for the period advised. It is often easier to sleep sat upright on a few pillows, at least initially. Once you become more comfortable you can sleep on your back with your arm propped up on a pillow, or sleep on your unaffected side, again with your arm supported on a pillow.

Washing

Following your surgery it is important to protect the wound from infection while it heals. This means keeping it clean and dry. After the stitches have been trimmed / removed at 10 to 14 days from your surgery you are free to shower. You will be given a different sling to wear for showering so that your usual sling is kept dry for use the rest of the time.

You need to make sure that your armpit remains clean and dry as it is easy for this to become sweaty and develop skin irritation. People often need assistance to wash, at least in the initial stages following surgery.

Dressing and Undressing

It can be tricky to get dressed using one arm. When dressing, place your injured arm in first and when undressing, remove your good arm first. You may find it easier to rest your arm on a table or your lap when dressing and undressing.



Loose fitting clothes are easier, while buttons are particularly difficult and you may require assistance with these.

Shoe laces are difficult with one hand and so slip on or velcro shoes may be better if you don't have someone available to tie and untie your laces.

Exercises

You will be given a list of exercises to undertake following your surgery. Initially these will be very limited and will just aim to stop the shoulder and elbow / wrist / hand from getting stiff. It is also important to perform some gentle neck exercises as wearing a sling can cause your neck to stiffen.

Potential problems from wearing a sling

Stiffness or aching in your neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand.

Swelling in your arm and hand. This comes from both the effect of the surgery and from a reduction in the amount you will be moving your arm.