

Exercises After Radiation Therapy

Your Guide to Head and Neck Radiation Therapy

Radiation treatment can cause scarring and other tissue damage in the treatment area. These side effects are called *fibrotic changes*. When the treatment area includes the neck and jaw, fibrotic changes can affect how well you can move your head and neck.

The exercises in this handout are designed to help lessen these problems. Doing these exercises will help you:

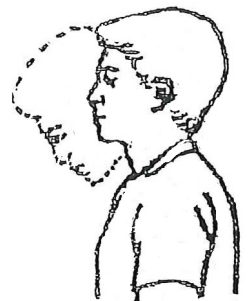
- Keep normal movement in your neck and jaw
- Prevent *contractures* (shortening of the soft tissue or muscle)
- Keep fluid from gathering in the treatment area

Ask your doctor which exercises will be most helpful for you. Also ask how long to do them. If your doctor says you are at high risk for fibrotic changes, we encourage you to start these exercises soon after treatment and to keep doing them. They may help in your physical rehabilitation and prevent long-term problems.

Neck Exercises

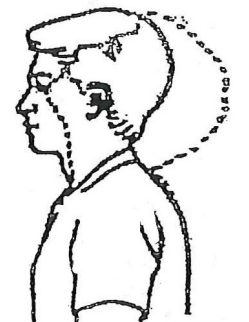
Exercise #1: Chin to Chest

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Tilt your head forward. Try to touch your chin to your chest, if you can. Then return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



Exercise #2: Look Up

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Tilt your head back and point your chin toward the ceiling. Then return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



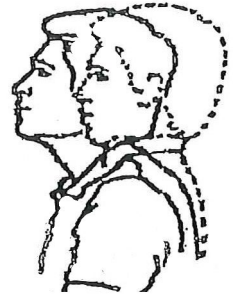
Exercise #3: Ear to Shoulder

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Tilt your head toward one shoulder, then slowly tilt it toward the other should. Then return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



Exercise #4: Pigeon Head

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Keeping your jaw and eyes level, pull your head straight back. Then return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



Exercise #5: Looking Side to Side

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Slowly turn your head to look over one shoulder. Then slowly turn your head to look over the other shoulder. Then return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



Exercise #6: Neck Stretch

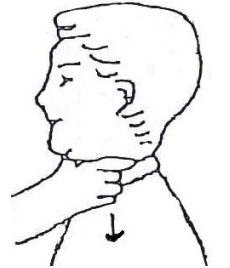
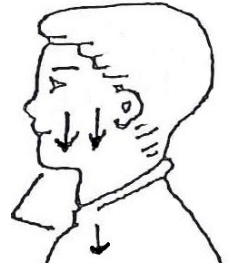
- Sit on a solid surface, such as a hard chair. Start by looking straight ahead.
- Tuck your left hand under your left buttock.
- Place your right hand on the top of your head and apply light pressure to gently tilt your head toward your right shoulder.
- Relax and return to the starting point.
- Do this _____ times in a row. Then change sides and sit on your right hand. Use your left hand to tilt your head. Do this _____ times.
- Repeat both sides _____ times a day.



Exercise #7: Neck Massage

This exercise helps move lymph fluid out of the treatment area to prevent lymphedema.

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Place one hand on your upper throat, with your thumb on one side of your neck and your fingers on the other side.
- While gently pressing in, stroke your thumb and forefinger down the sides of your neck. Stroke all the way down to your collarbone.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.



Jaw Exercises

If you are having trouble opening your mouth, or if the problem is getting worse, tell your doctor.

Exercise #1: Open Wide

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Open your mouth as wide as you can. Hold for 5 seconds. Release.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.

Exercise #2: For Jaw Contracture

If you have jaw contracture, we will provide tongue depressors (blades) and teach you how to use them. Over time, increase the number of blades you use. Most times, you will be adding 1 to 2 blades each week.

- Do this for 5 minutes. Repeat 2 times a day.

Exercise #3: Jaw Press

This *resistance* exercise will help strengthen your jaw muscles.

- Start by looking straight ahead.
- Place the heels of both hands under your jaw. While gently pushing up, try to open your mouth. Hold for _____ seconds, then relax.
- Do this _____ times in a row.
- Repeat _____ times a day.

Face Exercises

For each of the exercises shown below:

- Hold the position for _____, then release.
- Repeat the motion _____ times in a row.
- Do the exercise _____ times a day



Purse lips



Retract lips



Move lips left



Move lips right



Open jaw wide



Move sides of mouth downward

Exercise Tips

Do:

- Keep your neck warm. Wear a scarf when going outside and drafty areas.
- Tuck in your chin when looking down.
- When lying on your back or side:
 - Use pillows for support
 - Keep your head straight
- Strengthen your neck by:
 - Moving your head 5 times every hour during the day -- forward and from side to side
 - Avoiding painful positions
 - Avoiding activities that bother your neck

Do NOT:

- Tilt or rotate your head to the side when lying on your back or side
- Keep your head in one position too long
- Sleep on your stomach
- Lift or carry heavy objects

Helpful Tips for Healing

- If your doctor says it is OK, do the exercises in this handout every day.
- Stay active. Try to do your normal routines.
- Try doing your neck and jaw exercises in the shower. Warm water helps your muscles stretch.
- Always go to your clinic visits.
- If any health issues arise, tell your doctor.
- Try not to get discouraged. Healing takes time.

