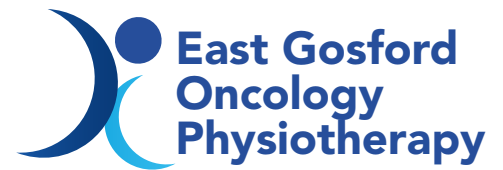




Gosford Oncology
Physiotherapy
& Massage



East Gosford
Physiotherapy
& Exercise Physiology



East Gosford
Oncology
Physiotherapy

Head and Neck Cancer Rehabilitation The Road to Recovery



Available at 2 practices:

Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy & Massage
3 Hills St Gosford (upstairs)

East Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy
24 Brougham St | East Gosford



Dedication
Professionalism
Expertise



Australasian
Lymphology
Association

www.eastgosfordphysio.com.au

43237499

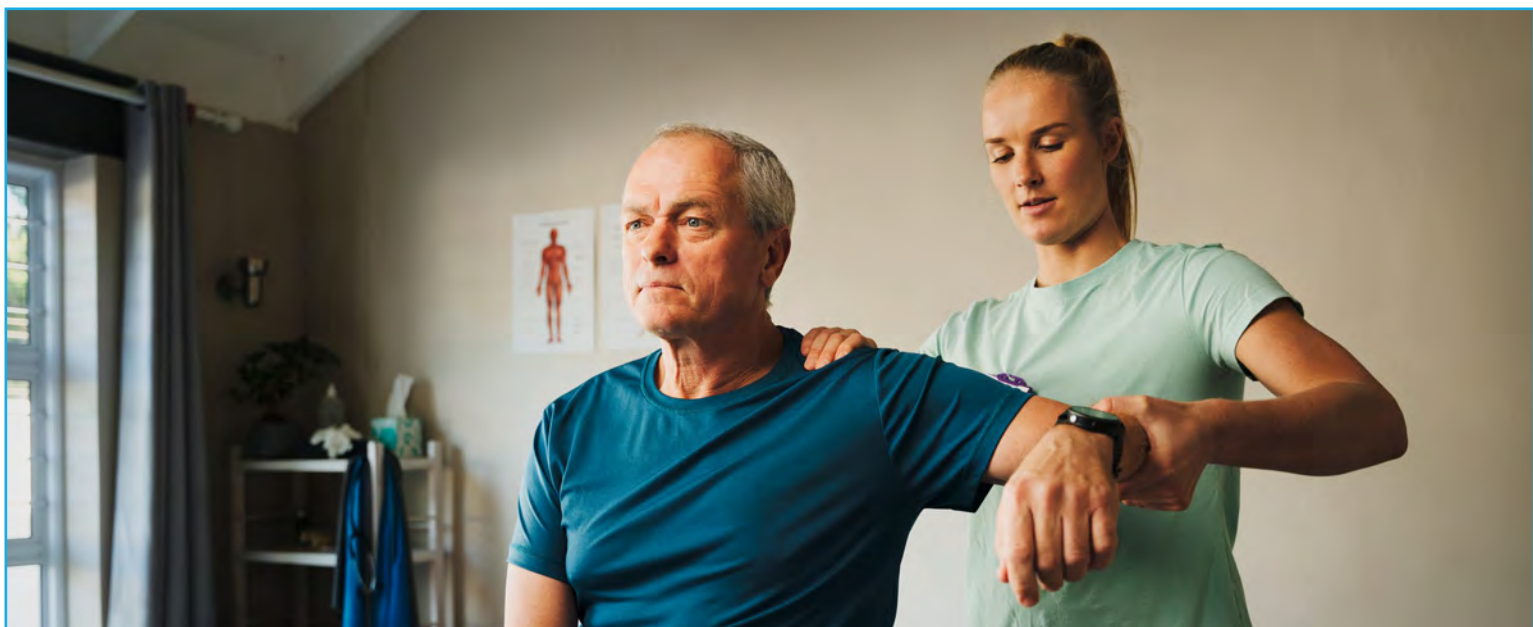
Introduction to Head and Neck cancer rehabilitation and the Strong Survivor journey.

Head and Neck cancer is a general term that can cover many forms of cancer that require many forms of treatments which unfortunately can lead to side effects.

East Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy has developed a program to help rehabilitate men and women who have undergone treatment for head and neck cancer to help them start on their recovery journey.

Possible side effects from treatment for head and neck cancer may include:

- Scarring and skin tightness
- Skin problems
- Lymphoedema or swelling
- Pain
- Difficulty with breathing or swallowing
- Stiffness in neck and shoulder movement



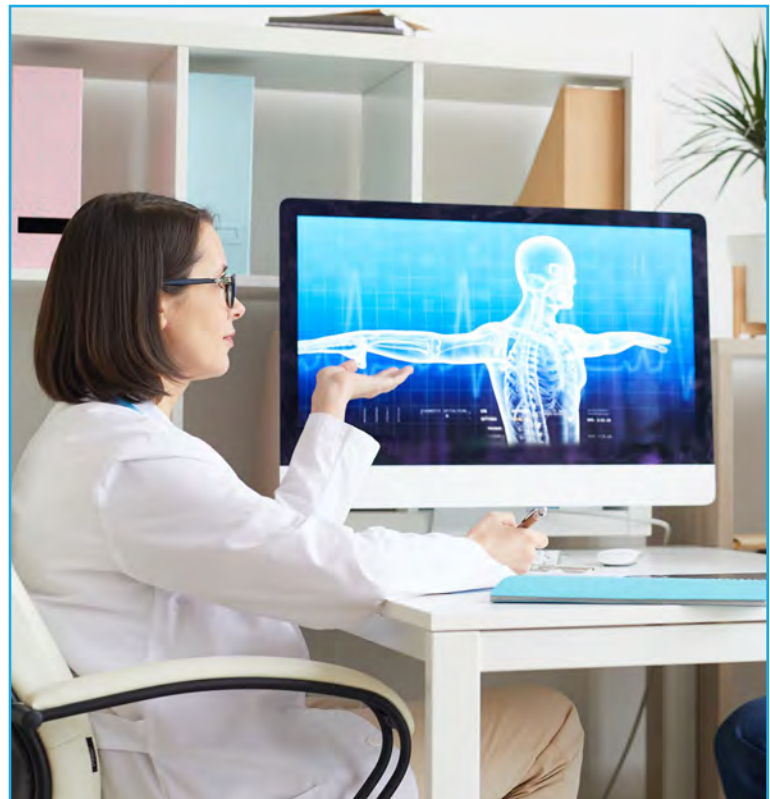
- Our highly trained physiotherapists at East Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy will provide a complex assessment in our safe, hygienic clinic and then advise you on a rehabilitation pathway to help you recover.

Strong Survivor Cancer Rehabilitation work is a 3 phase journey.

We advise to start your rehabilitation journey before your treatment begins. This can help to reduce or even avoid some common side effects commonly experienced during treatment.

A **pre-rehabilitation phase** can begin immediately after your diagnosis whilst your Doctor is planning your treatment course.

At this stage we help you get as strong and fit as you can before treatment.



After you have undergone your Oncology treatment and your specialist gives you the “all clear” to get moving and exercise, we can start the **post treatment phase**.

This helps you to recover from your treatment or surgery and we will assess and manage joint stiffness, muscle weakness and pain. At this stage you are assessed for lymphoedema risk and may start early management.

The final and sometimes ongoing phase of your journey is what we call the **Strong Survivor Phase**. This is where you learn to re-condition your body and restore long term strength and mobility. If you have developed lymphoedema this can be managed with an ongoing maintenance program including self-care and monitoring as required.

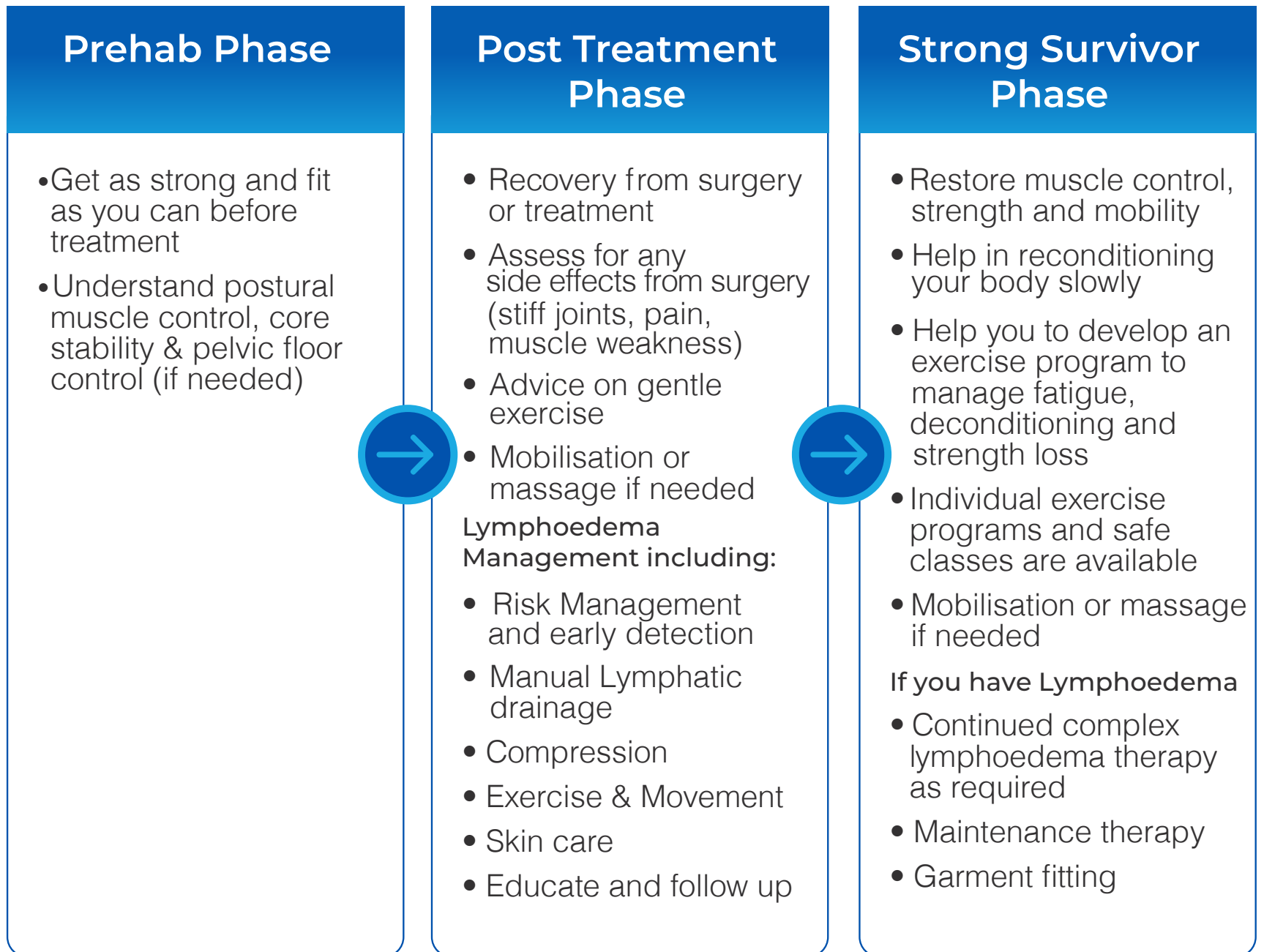
We will try and make this phase as independent as possible with a home-based program. We also offer supportive exercise classes which will help with motivation and more tips from our team.

Our exercise class is called “Keep Moving – Strong Survivor”.

Learn more about this class in the [link](#) below.

<https://youtu.be/fN2s3hZoSQE>

Strong Survivor works in the 3 phases of your journey



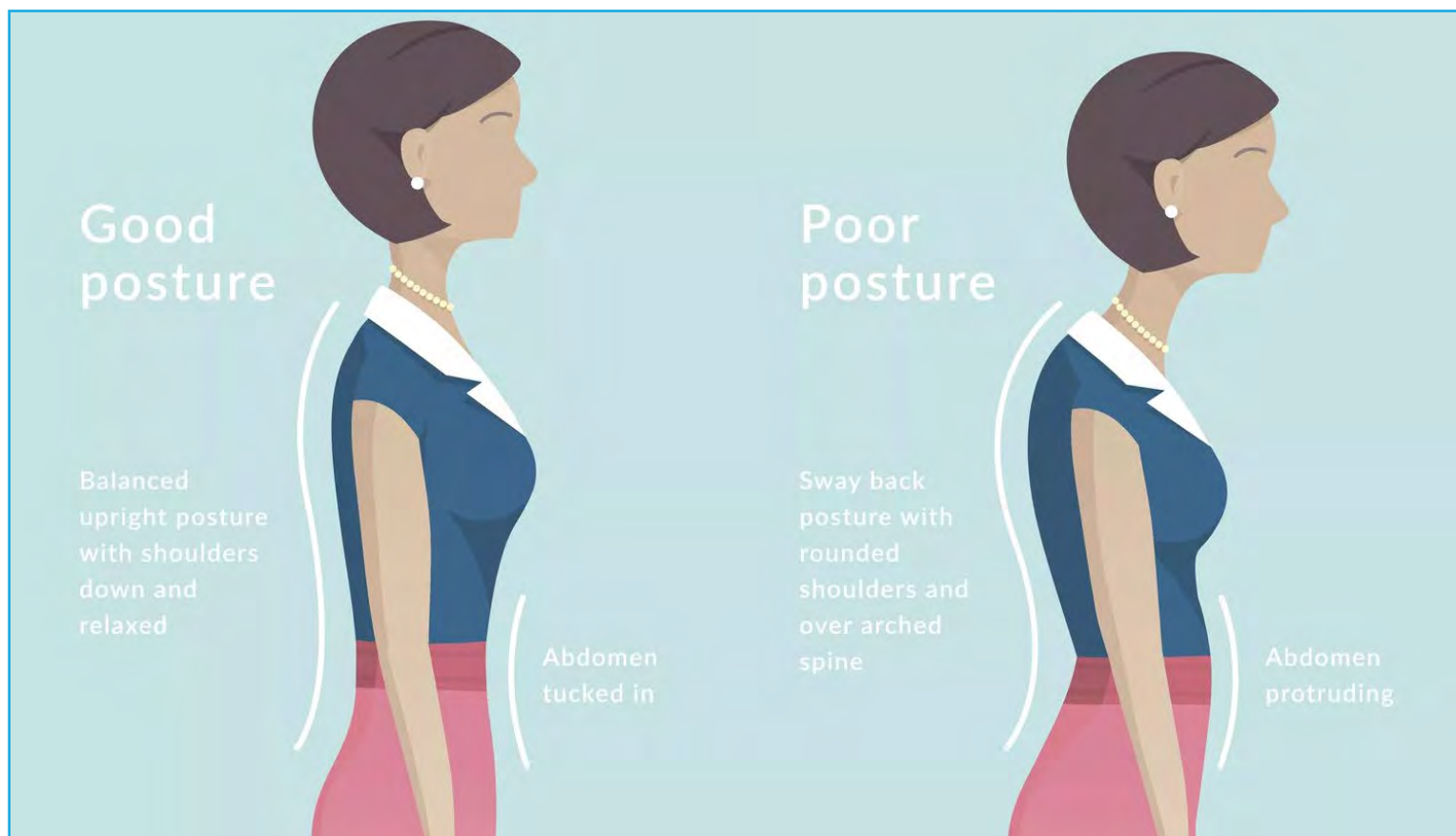
The importance of good posture during your Cancer Rehabilitation journey

Our body is designed to be aligned correctly for efficient function and movement. Pain from surgery, muscle weakness and detraining lead to losing good alignment of posture and this can lead to further pain and weakness.

Your core muscle work to 'stack' your upper body on your lower body and can become deconditioned or weak during your cancer journey.

We can advise you on some simple "core exercises" to get your posture set up well. Postural muscles are "endurance" muscles and a common error is that people try too hard to correct their posture leading to fatigue, and poor posture habits.

Good posture involves stacking your chest or rib cage on your lower body in a relaxed way. We then consider your shoulder girdle position and head position, both essential for preventing or managing neck and shoulder pain.



NECK AND UPPER BACK POSTURE

How do I exercise and move my neck & shoulder safely?

Surgery for head and neck cancer can lead to fear of moving your head and neck due to pain.

Once your surgical wounds are healed, and you get clearance from your specialist or nurse to start your rehabilitation, it is important to start moving your head and neck in a controlled way. (ask if not sure, as the sooner you start is often the better)

Your physiotherapist will advise you on how to safely exercise your neck and start with basic neck movement. We strongly advise that you are individually assessed and advised before commencing your exercise routine, but you can also view our You Tube video for some instructions.



[Part 1 – Neck exercises](https://youtu.be/jl9d5aU8sek) _
<https://youtu.be/jl9d5aU8sek>



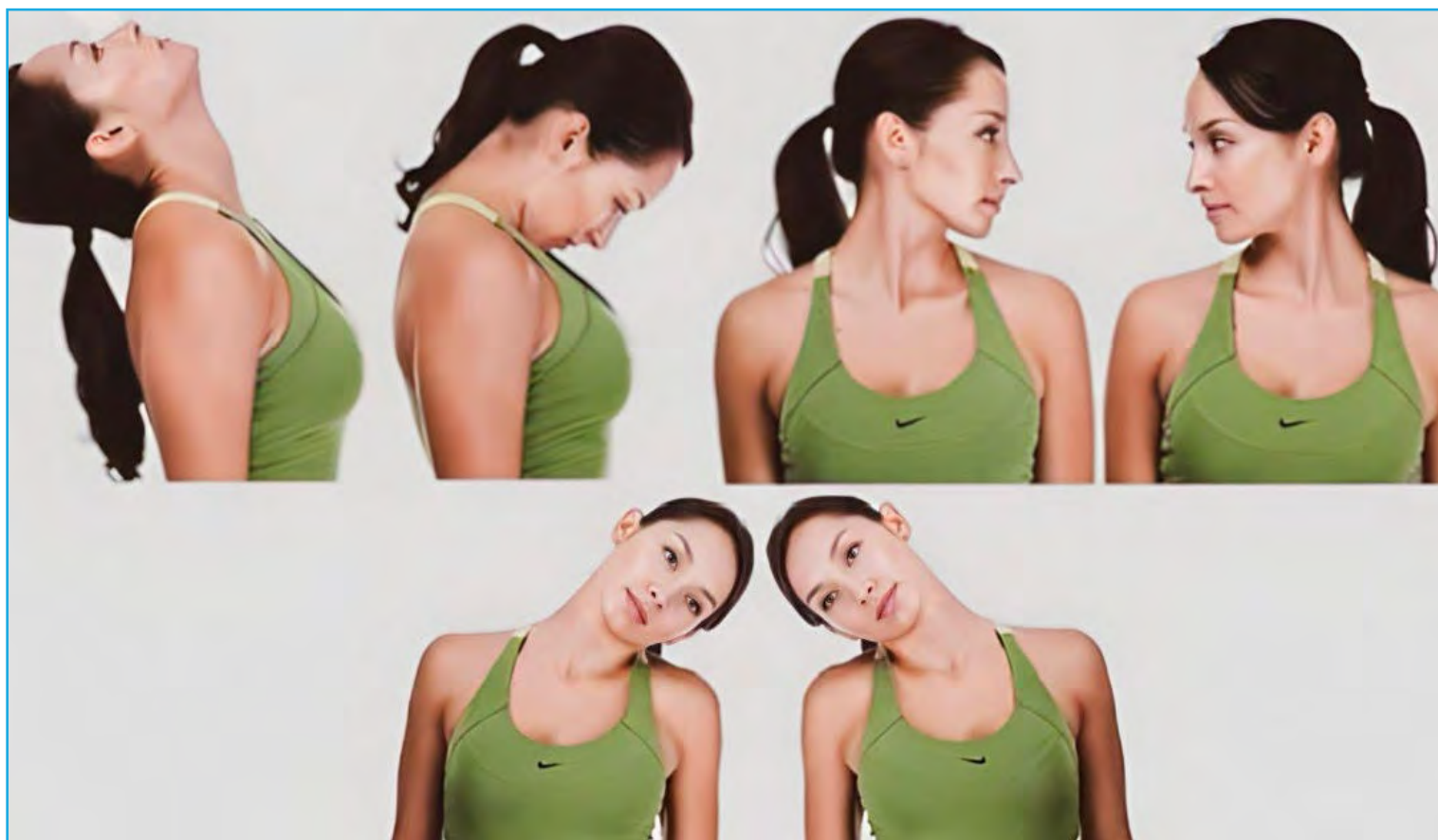
[Part 2- Shoulder exercises](https://youtu.be/W-dFch3HMJk)
<https://youtu.be/W-dFch3HMJk>

Your neck and upper back must rotate both ways, side bend both ways and flex forward. You need to be more careful with tilting your head backward and looking at the sky as this can cause dizziness, and your physio will advise on this.

You will also be advised on how to position your shoulder with awareness of your shoulder blade position and how to exercise your shoulder without causing pain.

Warning:- if you develop pain that does not reduce once you repeat the exercise a few times, you must STOP and seek further advice.

If you develop dizziness or vertigo that does not settle quickly – you also must STOP, seek further advice from your Oncology Physiotherapist.



When do I start Strength Exercises?



Strength is important for function and posture. Strength exercises can be started in a gentle way once your post-surgical pain has settled and wounds have healed.

(NOTE- you must get the clearance from your specialist or nurse prior to commencing any strengthening program)

Strength exercises or resistance training is an important part of preventing a number of general health issues while you are recovering from cancer treatment and the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia COSA, makes this clear in their position statement on exercise in cancer care. (Reference 1)

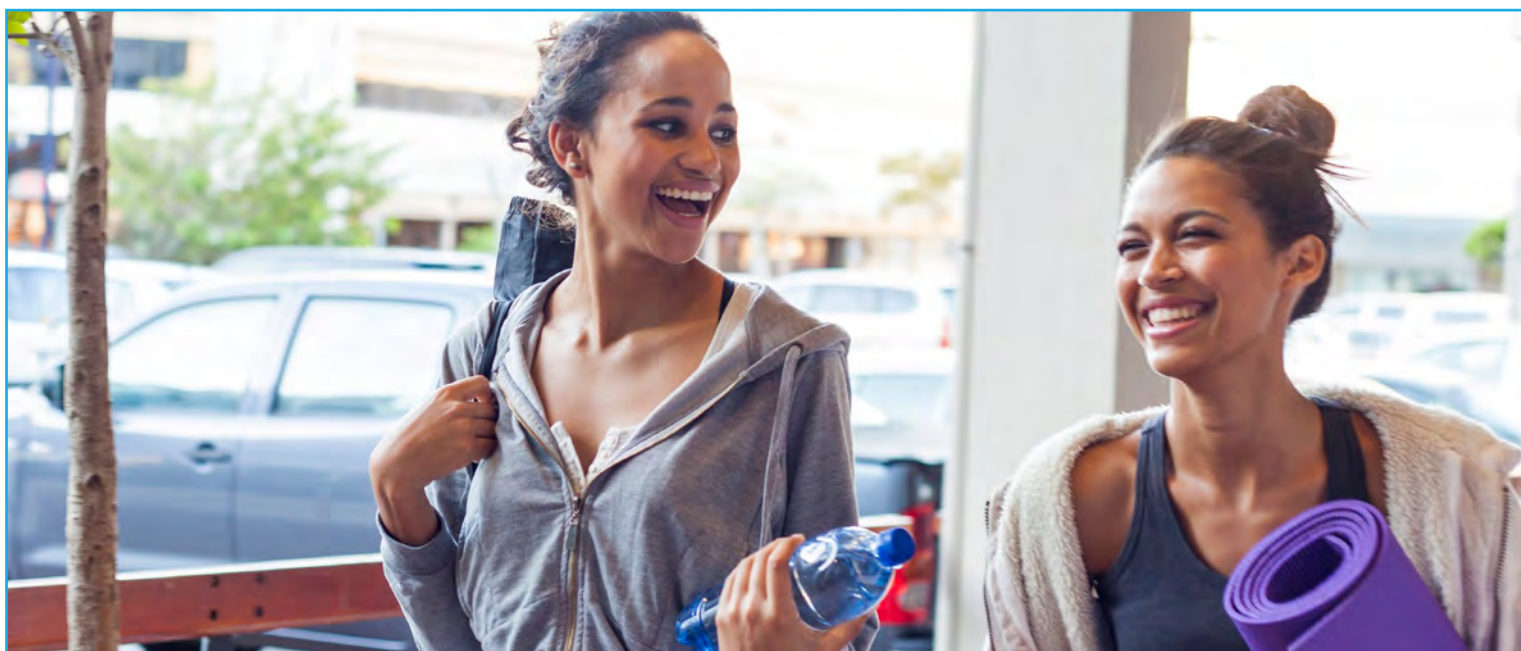
Resistance training will help improve your muscle size and general strength, reduce body fat, improve posture and improve balance all needed to live a healthy life and get you on the road to recovery.

Improving muscle strength around joints like the shoulder improves control and can help prevent rotator cuff injury, which is a common cause of shoulder pain after surgery. Strength exercises also help to manage osteoporosis and prevent bone fractures.

Unfortunately, the nature of cancer treatment makes you want to rest and become inactive and sedentary. Once you get started, strengthening exercises can reverse this feeling and surprisingly help with fatigue. Knowing what exercise to do when, is the trick, and we will guide you through this.

The correct “load” or intensity of exercise can mean the difference between working comfortably, or aggravating pain. Increasing pain is a warning sign to “back off” on your exercise and seek further advice.

Sedentary behaviour breeds sedentary behaviour, and we try to help you understand this. When you start exercising, especially with strength training, you will be surprised how fast you can improve your mood and positivity. Exercise releases chemicals in your brain that make you feel good and make you want to keep exercising.



Remember exercise breeds exercise!

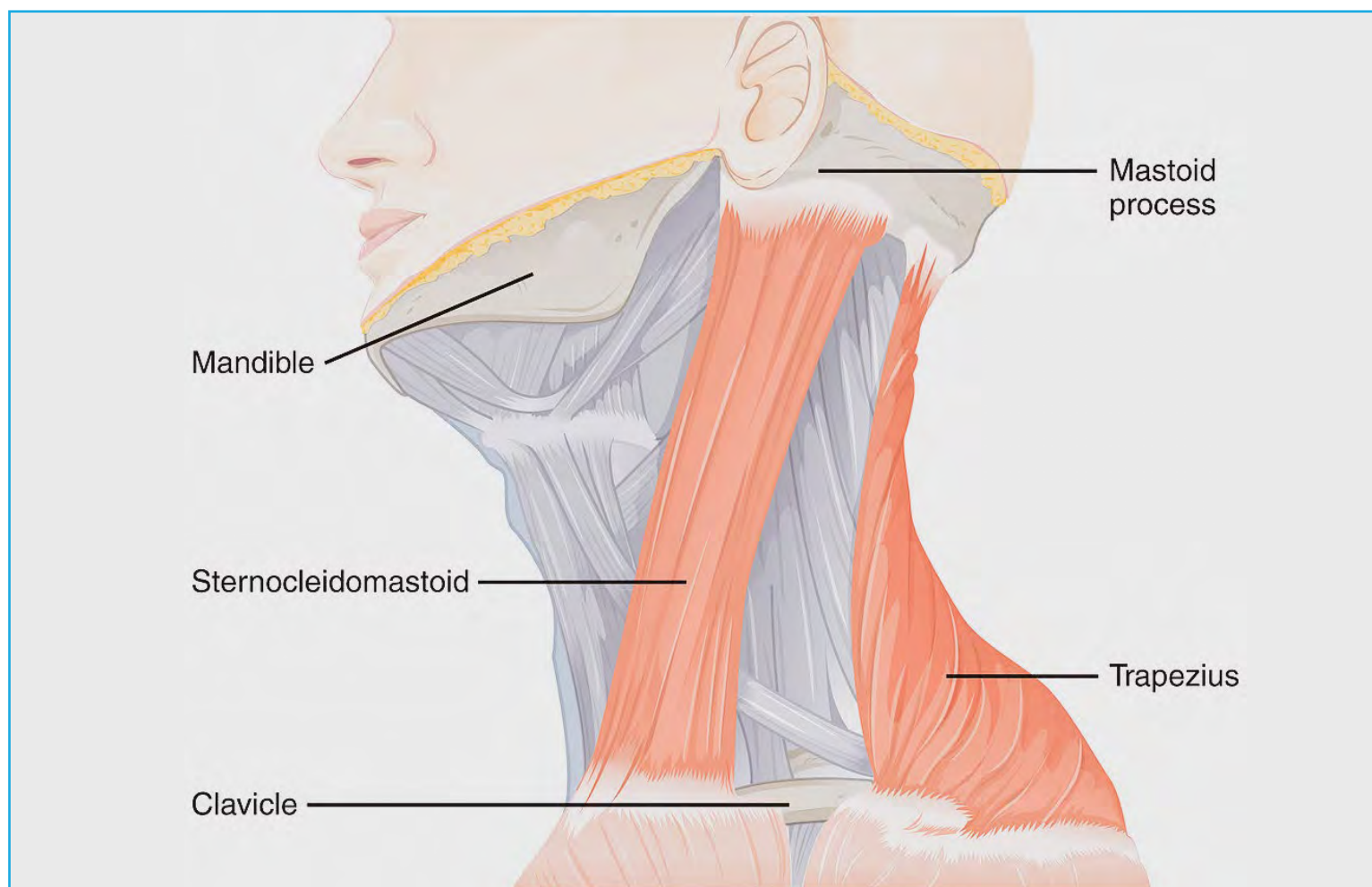
During your rehabilitation program, your physiotherapist will advise you on the strength program you require and advise how fast to progress.

Warning: - if you develop pain, that does not reduce once you repeat the exercise a few times, you must STOP and seek further advice.

If you develop dizziness or vertigo that does not settle quickly – you also must STOP and seek further advice from your Oncology Physiotherapist or GP.

Special consideration with rehabilitation of movement and strength following Head and Neck cancer.

Nerves in your neck can sometimes be affected by your surgery. This is taken into consideration with any rehabilitation of the head, neck and shoulder, as it will influence how much exercise you can do.



The spinal accessory nerve (SAN) gives power to muscles which help turn your head and position your shoulder blade. The two main muscles which can be affected or become weak are the sternocleidomastoid and trapezius. These muscles are complex in their actions and if they are weak, it will affect neck and shoulder posture and movement.

If the nerve is damaged or sacrificed during the surgery your shoulder will sit lower on that side (dropped shoulder) and the shoulder blade may wing out backwards (winging). Both these issues will lead to difficulties in using your arm above shoulder height due to weakness of the supporting muscles and cause pain and stiffness in the shoulder.

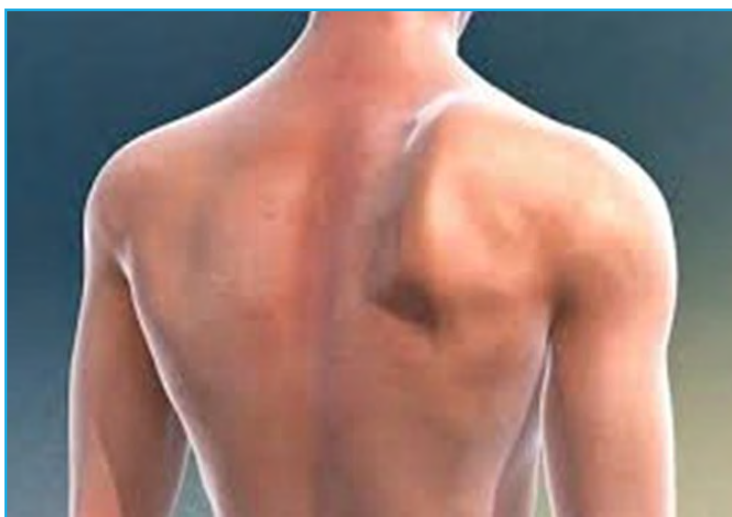
If the nerve has been sacrificed (or cut during surgery), these muscles will not recover their function as the muscles supplied by the nerve will not be able to be activated and will not work. In this case your physiotherapist will advise you on how to stretch your neck and shoulder to prevent progressive stiffness, which if left unattended will lead to pain.

Neck surgery can sometimes just bruise or injure the nerve without permanent damage and will affect the muscles of the shoulder and neck in the same way, but they can recover and strength can return with the right exercise program.

Unfortunately, this can take many months for recovery, so we need to ensure that the shoulder and neck moves well in this time to stop stiffness developing. Your physio will advise you on exercises to prevent joint stiffness and retrain the muscles to do their job.

See our video on shoulder exercises in this link:
<https://youtu.be/jl9d5aU8sek>

Your specialist or nurse will advise you on when you are safe to start exercising and we will take all precautions with wounds and scars to ensure you regain good function as quickly as possible.



Winging shoulder blade



Dropped Shoulder blade

Head and Neck Lymphoedema explained...

What is Lymphoedema?

Lymphoedema is swelling caused by damage to the lymphatic system.

This can occur when lymph nodes or vessels are removed or damaged during surgery or radiation.

Blockage of lymphatic vessels or nodes can also be caused by cancer in these areas.

[See our Lymphoedema eBook
https://eastgosfordphysio.com.au/wp-content/uploads/eBook-Lymphoedema-Management-Cancer-Rehab.pdf](https://eastgosfordphysio.com.au/wp-content/uploads/eBook-Lymphoedema-Management-Cancer-Rehab.pdf)



What are the symptoms of lymphoedema in the head or neck?

- Swelling through your face especially around your eyes, cheeks, neck or chin.
- Stiffness in your neck or jaw.
- Difficulty with swallowing, speech or breathing.

Management of Lymphoedema in the head and neck

How we can help you

Our specially trained, Registered Lymphoedema Physiotherapist will apply the following lymphoedema management techniques to help you understand, manage and self-treat your Lymphoedema.

- **Manual Lymphatic Drainage (MLD)** is a specialised form of massage which helps to clear the swelling from the areas of congestion in the face, head and neck. Your Lymphoedema Physiotherapist will apply this massage to you to speed up the drainage of lymphatic fluid. We will teach you how to self-manage and perform a simplified form of MLD in order to reduce your head and neck lymphoedema. This is known as Self-Lymphatic Drainage (SLD) and is an important self-management tool. (see link to video with demo)
- **Exercises to relieve stiffness and loss of movement.** Movement helps to improve the flow of lymphatic fluid out of congested areas. These exercises may be commenced when you have permission from your specialist or oncology health team to start to start moving. We will individually assess you and start you on an exercise program appropriate to your stage of recovery. (Please read the section above about safe exercise).
- **Skin care.** Managing your skin when you have lymphoedema is essential and we have a role in helping you understand this. It is important to keep your skin clean and well moisturised as this decreases your risk of infection. Once the skin and wounds have healed completely from radiation or surgery, you can use a gentle fragrance-free moisturiser and gently massage into your neck and face daily. During radiation therapy, your radiation oncology team will advise you about which moisturiser you should be using.
- **Scar Management** is taught to help your surgical wounds and scars heal in the best way possible. Scars need to be soft and mobile to allow for lymphatic fluid to drain through the lymphatic vessels and tissue. Scar management techniques will be used by your Oncology Physiotherapist and will be taught to you specifically related to your stage of healing.
- **Compression garments** may also be used to control swelling. Your Lymphoedema Physiotherapist will advise and guide you to the right choice for your situation.

Please go to this 3 part short video series to learn how you can start to self-manage your head, face and neck lymphoedema -



Part 1

<https://youtu.be/gWVla14e2XY>



Part 2

<https://youtu.be/xoTc8gG0eOc>



Part 3 <https://youtu.be/4y5cnL1BI9M>

Group Exercise at East Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy Strong Survivor

Once you have started your rehabilitation journey and are recovering from the effects of your cancer treatment you are now a Strong Survivor. The Strong Survivor Phase is all about keeping you safe and motivated with exercise progression. Exercise at this stage can come in many forms and you can decide what works for you so you can stay active and keep enjoying your exercise. For some people this is by themselves in a gym or at home and for others it is in a class or exercise group.

East Gosford Oncology Physiotherapy have partnered with **East Gosford Physiotherapy** and **Exercise Physiology** to offer small group exercise classes called Keep Moving – Strong Survivor. Watch this video to learn more about our class <https://youtu.be/fN2s3hZoSQE>



We will help you get ready for a class with our Back on Track program of individualised exercises closely supervised by a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist and advise you when you are safe to start group exercise. We do the exercises with you, until you feel safe to do them by yourself.

This journey to independence is different for everyone. So, we simply “hold your hand” a little, to help you continue on your recovery journey.

References

1. COSA position statement on Exercise in Cancer Care, Clinical Oncology Society of Australia. Version 1, 2018 <https://eastgosfordphysio.com.au/wp-content/uploads/cosa-position-statement-v4-web-final-1.pdf>
2. East Gosford Physiotherapy website – Oncology Physiotherapy section, updated 2023, Russ Tuckerman and Lindy Radmann
3. Physiotherapy following Neck Dissection Surgery for head and neck cancer- NSW health, Central Coast Local Health District - Staff Resource, Version 3, 2021, reviewed by C Clapham, Acknowledgements- Dr A McGarvey, Calvary Mater Hospital

In Association with East Gosford Physiotherapy and Exercise Physiology

24 Brougham St

East Gosford 2250

Ph 43 237499

www.eastgosfordphysio.com.au

www.eastgosfordoncologyphysio.com.au



Australasian
Lymphology
Association

