

Patient information

Managing with one hand following injury or surgery

This leaflet has been designed to provide you with advice and techniques to be able to manage at home following hand, wrist, elbow or shoulder injury, immobilisation or surgery.

How will I manage to wash and dress myself?

Washing

Make sure you sit down to complete your personal care. When washing, you may find sponges easier to squeeze out than a flannel and liquid soap easier to use than bars of soap.

Dressing

- Choose looser fitting clothes as they are easier to get on and off. Blouses and shirts with larger buttons are a better choice than t-shirts and jumpers. Ladies may find skirts and dresses easier to manage than trousers
- Elasticated waists are also easier to manage than zips and buttons when dressing with one hand.
- Fastening a bra can be difficult so try fastening it at the front and then moving the clasp round to the back. One of the straps may lie across your incision if you are having shoulder surgery so either leave the affected side without a strap, or wear a strapless bra.
- Choose slip-on shoes or those with Velcro rather than with laces and ladies should try and manage without tights/stockings as these can be awkward to put on.

Dressing technique

- Always dress your affected arm first.
- Place a pillow on your lap and rest your affected arm on it.
- Place your shirt/blouse/cardigan next to this arm with buttons undone and facing you.
- With your affected arm out of the sling (if you have one) place the hand in the sleeve for this arm, still resting on the pillow where possible.
- Using your unaffected hand, feed the material of this sleeve over your elbow and up the affected arm.
- When the sleeve is on, either hold the collar with your stronger hand and pull round your neck so that your stronger arm can fit in its sleeve, or drop your stronger hand to your side and reach your clothing from there.
- When removing your shirt/blouse/cardigan always undress your unaffected arm first and reverse the stages above.

How will I manage kitchen tasks?

- If possible, keep a chair in the kitchen to rest on if needed and where possible, prepare food sitting down.
- Try to leave out on the work surfaces all the things that you use regularly so that they are within easy reach.
- Ready meals are often simpler as they require less preparation.
- If possible, use a microwave rather than a conventional oven. If using a conventional oven, try to use the most accessible shelf and the lightest oven dish available.
- If cooking vegetables in water on the hob, when cooked, lift them out with a slotted spoon and let the water cool before emptying the saucepan. This will help you to avoid carrying hot water across the kitchen.
- Cordless and travel kettles are lighter to use than the traditional type.

- It can be easier and safer to keep your kettle plugged in all the time and to switch it off at the wall when not in use.
- It may be easier to fill the kettle using a lightweight jug rather than taking the kettle to and from the sink. Boil only as much water as you need.
- Think ahead to what you will be using in the kitchen throughout the day and leave packets and tins out so that a visitor can open them for you if you cannot manage.

How will I manage domestic tasks?

Most cleaning tasks can be completed using one hand however you may wish to ask a friend or family member to assist you until you feel able to manage yourself.

You may find it difficult to carry items using one hand especially up and down stairs so try to plan ahead as to what you may need and ask a friend or family member to do this for you. You will also need to ask someone to assist you with changing your sheets/duvet cover, folding laundry, ironing and doing the gardening.

You may need to find a different way of getting your shopping. Most supermarkets offer internet shopping which can be delivered to your door. You could also use a taxi to travel to and from your home. Alternatively ask a friend or family member to assist you with your shopping needs.

Getting on and off furniture

- A higher armchair will be easier to stand up from.
- In bed, use extra pillows to support your affected arm and to prop you up in bed which may be more comfortable.
- When getting out of bed, it may be easier to get out on the side nearest your stronger arm.
- Use your leg muscles to help you stand from the toilet; however, if you find this difficult, your Occupational Therapist can advise you.
- When using the toilet, tear off the toilet paper before you sit down or use a box of tissues instead of toilet roll.

When can I return to driving?

It is advisable not to drive for six weeks after your surgery. If in doubt, please discuss this with your consultant.

When can I return to work?

This will depend on the type of work you do. Please discuss this with your consultant or therapist.

General advice and guidance

- Give yourself plenty of time to complete tasks and try not to rush.
- Try to avoid carrying anything heavy as this may affect your balance.
- Keep stairs and walkways well-lit and clutter free.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net.

Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The Following have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Clare Archer – Lead Orthopaedic and Surgical Team Occupational Therapist, Rosy Shrubbs – Lead Integrated Discharge Team Occupational Therapist

The directorate group that has agreed this patient information leaflet:
Community Health and Integrated Care

Next review date: October 2025

Responsible clinician: Helen Jowett, Principal Clinician Occupational Therapy, Conquest Hospital Occupational Therapy Team

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