

Post-Breast Surgery Pain Syndrome



As a survivor of breast cancer, rehabilitation is crucial for managing treatment side effects and improving your quality of life. One common side effect of treatment for breast cancer is post-breast surgery pain syndrome, which can cause significant discomfort and functional limitations.

What is Post-Breast Surgery Pain Syndrome?

Damage to the nerves of the chest wall and axilla (armpit) can cause nerve pain and muscle spasm. Lumpectomy, mastectomy, sentinel lymph node biopsy and axillary lymph node dissection and breast reconstruction can all cause nerve damage. Radiation therapy can further damage the nerves leading to increased pain and spasm.

Common Symptoms

- Persistent pain in the chest wall, armpit, or upper inner arm
- Tingling or numbness
- Sensation of broken ribs or stabbing pain in the side
- Bandlike pain across the chest.
- Spasms of the chest wall muscles.
- Sensation of pain where the breast was.
- Discomfort that limits arm movement or daily activities.

Management

1. **Physical Therapy:** Improves range of motion and reduces pain using stretching, joint mobilization, and myofascial release.
2. **Occupational Therapy:** Assists with daily activities and maintaining independence.
3. **Lymphedema Therapy:** Reduce swelling and delays fibrosis formation on the affected tissues.
4. **Stretching:** Holding gentle stretches for several minutes can break up tissue and help increase space on the nerves.
5. **Massage:** light touch to the area can help to decrease the sensation of pain and help increase the flexibility of the tissue over time.
6. **Medications:** Neuropathic pain medications (e.g., gabapentin),

topical creams, and others may be recommended.

7. **Nerve Blocks:** Injections targeting the affected nerve can provide significant pain relief for some patients.
8. **Botulinum Toxin Injection:** Spasm of certain muscles can be relieved by injection of botulinum toxin directly into them.
9. **Multidisciplinary Care:** Working with a team-including physiatrists, physical therapists, and psychologists-offers the best outcomes.

Remember

Post-breast surgery pain syndrome can be challenging, but with early intervention and a comprehensive management plan, you can improve your symptoms and quality of life. Always consult with your healthcare team to tailor these strategies to your specific needs.

Additional Resources

- Contact your healthcare provider for personalized advice.
- Visit local cancer support groups for community support.

Explore online resources for more information on managing post-breast surgery pain syndrome.



International Cancer
Rehabilitation Foundation®

References: Doherty DJ, Wilson CM, Borigt LE. *Oncology Rehabilitation: A Comprehensive Guidebook For Clinicians*. Elsevier: Missouri; 2023, Stubblefield MD, O'Dell MW. Synopsis of Clinical Oncology. Springer Publishing Company. 2010. ISBN: 1936287005, Chappell AG, Yuksel S, Sasson DC, Wescott AB, Connor LM, Ellis MF. Post-Mastectomy Pain Syndrome: An Up-to-Date Review of Treatment Outcomes. *JPRAS Open*. 2021;30:97-109. Published 2021 Aug 11. doi:10.1016/j.jpra.2021.07.006

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