

Managing activities of daily living with one hand following injury or surgery

This leaflet has been designed to provide practical advice and techniques to manage everyday activities following upper limb injury to hand, wrist, elbow or shoulder immobilisation or surgery.

Washing and drying

- It is advisable to carry out this task in a seated position to carry out your personal care routine.
- Most areas of the body can be reached by one hand.
- You may find it easier to use a sponge as opposed to a flannel and a hand pump soap dispenser.
- Use a long-handled back brush/sponge or loafer for your back and underarm.
- Sit and place a towel over your knee and rub your arm over it.
- Wear a towelling bath robe.

Dressing

- Select loose fitting clothing, either with front fastening or that you can slip over your head.
- Elasticated waists are easier to manage than zips and buttons when dressing with one hand.
- Fastening bras may be difficult so try fastening it at the front of your body and moving it around.

Dressing techniques

- When putting an item of clothing on, always start by dressing the affected arm first.
- Place a pillow on your lap and rest the affected arm on it.
- Place your upper body garment next to this arm with buttons undone and facing you- Partly fastened garments may also provide an easier way to put them on.
- With the affected arm (out of the sling) place the hand in the sleeve and feed material over your elbow and upper arm using your un-affected arm. Ensure arm is still resting on the pillow.

- When sleeve is on, hold the collar and pull around the neck so that your stronger arm can fit through the sleeve.
- When undressing remove your upper body garments and always undress your unaffected side first and reverse the above stages.
- Choose slip-on shoes or those with Velcro straps rather than those with laces. Women may want to consider managing without stocking or tights temporarily as these can be awkward to put on.

Kitchen tasks

- If possible, keep a stool in the kitchen to rest on if needed and where possible prepare food sitting down.
- Ready meals are often simpler as they require less preparation.
- If boiling vegetables on the hob, use a hand held sieve spoon to lift them out of the water. Let the water cool before emptying pan.
- On the work surfaces try to leave out everyday items you use regularly so they are in easy reach.
- Use your operated arm for cutting up food and holding a cup as soon as you feel able. Non-slip mats and other simple aids can help.
- Cordless travel kettles are lighter to use than the traditional type.
- It may be easier to fill the kettle using a jug. Boil just as much water as you need.
- It is advisable to think ahead to what you may need from the kitchen. Leave jars and tins out so your visitors can open them for you if you cannot manage.

Getting on and off furniture

- A higher arm chair will make it easier to stand up from. Consider raising the height using extra cushions or pillows.
- In bed, use extra pillows to support the affected arm and prop yourself up in bed.
- 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 this is difficult an occupational therapist can advise you on other methods.

Managing domestic tasks

Most cleaning tasks can be completed using one hand; however, you may wish to ask a friend or family member to provide assistance until you feel able to manage for yourself. You may find it difficult to carry items using one hand, especially up and down the stairs, so try to plan ahead as you may also need a friend or family member to do this for you. You may require assistance with shopping. Most supermarkets offer a service for home delivery and accept orders online or via telephone (contact your local store for details).

General advice

- Give yourself plenty of time when completing tasks and try not to rush.
- Avoid carrying and lifting heavy items as this could affect your balance.
- Keep walkways and stairs well lit and clutter free.
- If you have any concerns please speak to your occupational therapist.

Important information

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

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This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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