

Patient Diary

Arthroscopic Subacromial Decompression and AC Joint Excision

I am 56 years old, housewife and mother of two now grown-up boys, and looking after home, garden and allotment, enjoying all sorts of work from fine needle work to bricklaying, together with my part time job as general outdoor grounds person at a sailing club, keeps me very busy and active. I also volunteer with a disabled sailing group at the sailing club, taking clients out on a sailing boat, power boat or helming or crewing a safety boat.

A year ago I fell twice on my right arm (I am right handed), within 6 weeks. As it didn't feel like broken bones I just thought the pain will go away eventually - just bear with it. It did get better but then 3 months later, as I was just reaching for something, I could feel a "ping" in my shoulder - all the pain was back and I was very restricted in my movements. The pain got better, but my range of movement did not. Bringing my arm up above my shoulder or behind my back was impossible, so was getting dressed normally. Any heavy duty work brought on aches and pains. Eventually I went to my GP and asked for a list of shoulder specialists.

Day One

Had my shoulder op (right side) yesterday. I always worry about operations and GAs, as I suffer badly afterwards.

The anaesthetist was ever so nice, promised to do his best and the atmosphere in the theatre was very relaxed. My consultant, Mr Brownlow, operated on my older son's shoulder 11 years ago and was brilliant then, has a lovely way of making me feel at ease. I woke up feeling very comfortable on the trolley and didn't want to move. It was puzzling to feel quite a bit of pain in my upper arm, but none in my shoulder. Somehow the staff convinced me to wake up more and move across into my proper bed!

Back in my room I had the best few hours after an op I ever had-only to be followed by the worst reaction! I started feeling sick and that wonderful meal I had was left half eaten. Then, just as my husband came for a visit the pain came. It got really bad, all in my upper arm. Nurses were rushing, my legs went up, my head went down, a horrible smelling mask was clamped on my nose and the blood pressure was constantly monitored as it had dropped too much. Somehow the mask was exchanged for these little tubes which smelled much nicer- I suspect it was oxygen. The pain, which seemed 13 out of 10, was just awful! Eventually everything got back

to a bit more normal. But I did not have a good night. The nurse that night, Ben, was excellent. I felt really cared for. And even though his cup of tea at 5.30 in the morning seemed mad, it turned out to be the nicest thing that happened to me all day.

Feeling sick and still in pain, but not as bad as the previous evening, meant I could only eat half of my wonderful breakfast. It is very mean when you're offered all that lovely food and you can't eat it!

Being too weak and dizzy to even attempt to walk to the toilet they put a special chair next to my bed-didn't really work.

My wonderful consultant came by and I was so glad to see him. I told him about my bad reaction and that I'm feeling lousy and that I'm worried about going home later that morning. He said they wouldn't send me home if I was feeling too bad. All very well for him to say! He just walks away again and doesn't see what happened later.

In his wake came the physiotherapist. I couldn't even sit at the edge of my bed without feeling dizzy and sick. The exercises were just exhausting! Somehow I managed to get myself dressed, part of the exercises, but all I wanted was to be in my nightie and sleep! I felt so full of drugs, too. At one stage I was given something that made me feel totally spaced out for a few minutes.

I had to try and walk to the toilet with help. No energy. Somehow I managed to pass a bit of urine. Back in bed I had what I can only describe as a panic attack. How am I going to manage at home, climbing the stairs, when I can't even walk to the toilet unaided here in the hospital.

After my blood pressure returned to more stable conditions someone came to explain about all the medication I was to be given to take home. I am not able to remember all this! Felt far too lousy for anything! All I wanted was peace and sleep. No chance! I was sent home. While my husband packed my belongings I tried to fill in the questionnaire. I could only tick boxes-and yes, they have done this and that. I managed to write Ben's name as outstanding staff, but my hand was too jittery to physically write anything, and being right handed with arm in a sling is not easy. My brain could not think either.

Somehow (at home) I managed to climb the stairs, with help, and get into bed. Peace at last! Now, many hours later, I feel more settled, less sick, and I can get up and walk unaided. This is how I would have liked to leave the hospital.

I'm trying to get my head around all these drugs I am supposed to take.

Day Two

The drugs must be getting to me-I'm a bit on a high. My husband was back at work, he's only 10 minutes away, and I was up, in my nightie (no-one is going to see me anyway) , watering my greenhouse and all my pots in my garden, with the hose! Left handed only. A lot of walking backwards and forwards. Slept a lot, tried to read. Only ate toast, and some tomatoes. My stomach doesn't feel great.

Changed my dressings-the best dressings to handle. I like them.

Day Three

Got a shock mid- morning! I had just taken the Oxycodone hydrochloride and thought I need to put on my glasses as everything around me looked a bit too fuzzy. My glasses, varifocals, made everything worse! I just didn't seem to be able to focus my eyes. That's it! No more drugs! Only Ibuprofen and Paracetamol if I need them. Felt tired and weary, but no pain, only slight aches.

Day Five

No pain. I live on salads as I'm still feeling sick.

In the evening moved my arm wrongly, though I was in a sling. I felt a tweak in my shoulder, the same tweak I felt after my second fall last summer. Oh no! Have I undone all the work? I am so worried. Took some paracetamol.

Day Six

Slept badly. Worried so much about my arm. Phoned Anita, Mr. Brownlow's wonderful secretary. She is so helpful. Mr. Brownlow phoned me back. He was very reassuring. I couldn't have done anything as I was in a sling. It made me feel a bit better, but overall it was not a good day. I felt down, frustrated, useless, miserable and tearful. I read a lot. My glasses just work for that. Anything to distract me from feeling miserable.

Day Seven

No Pain. Ok, try without any drugs. And try to do at least one activity, one household chore, a day.

Did some laundry. The wicker basket with collapsible handles comes in handy. So did the wash stand. Left hand only activity.

Feeling so much better today! Had my first physio session this evening. Some exercises needed to be corrected slightly. It's impossible to remember how to do

them properly when shown the day after the op while overcome by post-op sickness! Some new moves I could do very well. And still no proper pain, only some slight twinges. I love my exercises. 😊 Hurray! I got past my first week! 😊

Week Two

Woke up with the kind of pain I should have had all week but didn't: pain inside my shoulder where the stitches are and the key holes. Not bad pain, but persistent. Ok, time for some paracetamol, the first in a week. I also sat upright in bed and within a minute all pain and twinges disappeared.

What a week! Full of activities and finding out what I can do and how. All my past karate training comes in useful, too, as it taught me a lot about techniques, and what extra strength one can have by just adjusting ones arm slightly, and avoiding injury.

Using a hair dryer. Light washing-up with a "dish-matic", Same for drying dishes. Emptying dishwasher, ironing.

My biggest challenge this week was using the dustpan and brush. There was no way I could crouch down low enough, even with bending over, which I didn't want to do, to be able to hold the dustpan at the right angle. After a few trials I ended up kneeling on the floor, knees well apart, bending only slightly forward and holding the end of the dustpan handle at the right angle. Perfect! I am well able to kneel down on the floor and get up again, even without the help of any hands.

All this activity makes me feel so much more positive, more useful, and it is definitely a lot better than sitting around moaning about all the things I cannot do. I also suspect that being mobile helps with blood circulation and healing. So does my diet of plenty of fresh veg, fruit and protein according to my son's dietician student girlfriend. I am also very grateful for not having any pain. Though I still have days when I'm feeling a bit sick, and my body is tired. I try and listen to my tweaks and twinges, too- don't want to overdo things.

Week Two and a Half

Went shopping with my husband. I discovered I don't like shopping with him-too fast and not enough time to look around.

Back home, after unpacking all the shopping, I cleaned out one of the kitchen cupboards. Works fine with left hand only. Just takes longer. Then I baked two cakes. Stood on a Bavarian style foot stool. I was high enough to hold the electric mixer with my right hand and so I wouldn't get tangled with the cable. Worked well, just like the ironing. After lunch I went to bed and slept soundly for over two hours!

Cooked a roast dinner today ☺ it was a bit tricky as the roasting dish with the large guinea fowl was rather heavy I managed it without getting myself burnt!

Week Three

Had two wonderful friends round for lunch yesterday. They brought some food and I made a nice salad. But with all the cleaning beforehand and even some hoovering, left hand only, I went back to bed and a good sleep after they left. My shoulder was complaining a little bit. For some strange reason my shoulder likes an upright position. Any discomfort disappears when sitting upright, in bed, at the computer or on the sofa.

Discovered to my joy that I can hang up my washing on the line outside by pulling down the line to chest height and putting the pegs on with my right hand ☺

Had another physio session this evening. Got very worried afterwards: am I doing too much? Body belt can start to come off.

Still awake at 3 am, worrying. Read the booklet about the op, cover to cover. Worried even more. The booklet just doesn't explain how to do the exercises. With tension, without? There is a difference after all. And then the carrying bit. I'm not supposed to carry anything. Oh dear ☹ But I have been carrying things all along, like my breakfast bowl, because I like my breakfast in bed. But with arm and elbow well in and using wrist and sling for the weight, maybe that's ok. I just don't know. 2 hours sleep only, then getting ready to see Mr. Brownlow.

All my worrying for nothing!

He seemed very pleased with my progress and told me to keep doing what I'm doing, as long as I don't undo his work. But how do I know if I undo his work? I have no pain. Even when he lifted my elbow quite up, higher than I thought it could be moved, there wasn't even a twinge. I try and listen to my aches and twinges. Some aches are good like the stretching ones-I go just past my comfort zone and those aches feel good. Other aches don't and I stop what I'm doing the instant a bad ache happens. Like some of my new exercises, using a stick. One I cannot do as I can't get the technique right, and it hurts, but I discovered that I can do it without the stick by using my left hand directly. The angle is better and it's a lovely exercise.

Week Three and a Half

Started hand writing this "diary". Oh my! Every muscle in my arm that is involved in writing is complaining! Just shows you what three weeks inactivity does to ones muscles! And writing sideways on with arm moving away from body, as I usually do, is posing another problem. Discovered that if I hold the piece of paper in my left

hand I can slide it towards me as I write and my right arm can stay in one position. I'll never take being able to write with pen and paper for granted again.

Week Four

Wow! Another week gone. I have to be a bit more careful without the body belt. Every movement without the restraint seems to cause a twinge in my arm or shoulder. When I do a lot of chores the body belt goes back on, just to keep my shoulder safe, as I tend to overdo things and then I worry again. On Tuesday my shoulder was grumbling so much with all the extra exercises and movements that I had to take some Paracetamol - the first in two weeks! Really nothing to complain about. Thank God.

Yesterday I felt sick and weary-no energy for anything. Even my left shoulder is slightly aching now! My eyes don't want to focus. Not a good day ☹️ But this morning I felt a lot better, and so did my shoulder. Did my exercises often, but little and gently. Had another physio. Surprised myself and Gina, my physiotherapist. I was ahead already with my "assisted movement" that I used instead of the stick exercises. They were on tonight's agenda! Then Gina asked me to lift my right arm out in front of me with the help of my left hand. "How high can you get?" she asked. Almost all the way up and no twinges! Even a bit out to the side from the up position. Gina's face was one of big surprise. Mine, too. I did not think that I could get the arm up that much. It's a lovely stretch and I am allowed to continue with it, but not the side movement. My added new exercises are brilliant! Isometric, to get some strength back into my muscles. I love them! But have to be careful as I tend to "push" too hard. Need to listen to my body.

I asked to use the weighing scales as my GP put me on a low fat diet in March because of my high cholesterol level. I have lost 6 kg since March! Hurray! 😊

Week Four and a Half

I am surprised how much easier it is to move my arm now. Just within a few days. On Tuesday I thought will I ever be able to get out of the sling-every new move caused a twinge. Now those twinges are less frequent and the range of movement, still within limits, is so much better. I can even reach the back of my head now with bent elbow up in front and turning the back of my head towards my right hand. Easier for doing up my hair 😊

I love my isometric exercises. It's interesting to feel and see which muscles I use.

Tried sleeping with the back rest at its lowest setting, which is still a good 30 degree angle. Shoulder is not complaining anymore.

Managed to mow the lawn at the back, with my electric lawnmower, left handed only. So pleased with my achievement 😊

I am feeling so grateful for not having any real pain; grateful to God, my faith and for friends praying for me. And grateful for the great skills and care of my consultant! It all makes a huge difference to my recovery.

Week Five

Woke up with a wonderfully light arm. No heaviness, no tweaks, no twinges. It stayed like this all day 😊

Getting dressed is so much easier. Pulling up pants and trousers is almost normal again as my right elbow comes out to the side without complaints. Putting on my tops is just the way I used to do it before the op. And I can brush my teeth with my right hand again. 😊

I find myself automatically reaching for light switches and door handles. Just as well I still have to wear a sling, otherwise I might reach for something I really shouldn't. I can also now reach the top of my head comfortably, but the head is slightly tilted to the right. So many improvements in such a short time 😊 One more week to go before the sling comes off.

Week Five and a Half

The isometric exercises are going really well. I can push fully with arm and fist. The hand push still tweaks a little bit so I have to be careful. I can also reach the top of my head now with the front "cradle swing". Can't wait for my next lot of exercises!

Did some ironing today. Wow! Almost back to normal. I seem to have so much more strength and movement in my arm. I still have to be careful with lifting the iron. That's more for the left hand.

At home I'm now not always putting the sling back on after my exercises, and what with having a shower and getting dressed and maybe sitting at the computer straight after I might spend nearly two hours without the sling. In the evening I sit more and more often in front of the TV without the sling, or when I'm just reading. And I love stretching my arm up with the help of the left hand.

Week Six

During my exercises this morning I tried to see if I could lift my arm unaided out to the right side. I've been using a stick for that all along, even though Gina said I don't need that exercise anymore as she has given me another one. But the stick

one is such a lovely one and to my surprise I could lift my arm almost shoulder height! Unaided. I have to slowly lower it. And no twinge, tweak or uncomfortable feeling 😊 But straight away I worried again. Should I be doing this?

Had gone to bed without the sling. It was quite comfortable. I could sleep on my left side by hugging a pillow with my right arm. That felt really good. I even managed to turn half onto my right side, putting a pillow under my right arm. No complaints from my shoulder 😊 I'm still using the back rest.

Stayed out of the sling until 11.30 am. 6 weeks today since the op! I feel so much more mobile now, but I still have a long way to go. Tried to brush my hair with my right hand. No twinge in my shoulder.

Did some light work in the garden. Swept the patio. I can use a broom normally again, provided it is light sweeping.

Had more physio this evening. Another surprise for Gina and me! I can lift my arm unaided, much higher than I expected, even up out the front. Gina tested my strength. As she was sitting in her chair with wheels at the time she had to hold on to her desk very much or I would have pulled and pushed her quite a bit.

It's a pity Mr Brownlow can't see me now. My next appointment with him isn't for another 6 weeks.

No more sling (though I will use it for a bit longer as it is so nice to rest my arm and shoulder when they feel tired), I can drive again (I am so looking forward to going shopping on my own again!) and I can even swim with breast stroke, but no front crawl yet. I feel as if I have reached a massive milestone.

My first 6 weeks. Quite an experience. 😊

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