



Matwork for Breast Cancer Rehab

This year alone 2,660 women in Oklahoma will be diagnosed with breast cancer. It is one of the most difficult physical and emotional challenges you can face. Because of early detection and improved treatment plans more women will survive breast cancer today than ever before. They will be encouraged by healthcare providers to seek out fitness programs to assist in their recovery, to regain their strength and mobility, as well as endurance. If women are able to regain control of their physical recovery it will also help their psychological and emotional well being. But, there is a lack of cancer rehabilitation programs available to help women manage the physical and emotional impact of the disease. STOTT PILATES® has developed a program for this special group of women to help them regain mobility, strength and endurance called “Matwork for Breast Cancer Rehab”.

First let's define the different stages:

Stage 0 – Cancer cells remain inside the breast duct, without invasion into normal adjacent breast tissue.

Stage I – Cancer is 2 centimeters or less and is confined to the breast (lymph nodes are clear).

Stage II – The tumor is over 2 centimeters but no larger than 5 centimeters or it has spread to the lymph nodes.

Stage III – Also called locally advanced cancer. The tumor is more than 5 centimeters across, or the cancer is extensive in the underarm lymph nodes or it has spread to other lymph nodes.

Stage IV – The cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

A woman who is diagnosed with breast cancer may undergo a variety of treatments including breast biopsy, lymph node biopsy or removal, lumpectomy, mastectomy, or breast reconstruction. Any of these procedures can affect shoulder mobility, your ability to inhale deeply or to perform daily tasks such as dressing, bathing and combing your hair. Some of these procedures are minimally invasive and from a physical fitness stand point easier to recover from. Others are quite invasive and will take time, patience and a well devised recovery plan to regain full mobility as well as strength.

Regardless of the type of surgery you undergo, it is important to do exercises (with your doctors approval) to lessen the side effects of surgery and allow you to manage daily activities as soon as possible.



The American Cancer Society recommends the following exercises. Before starting any exercise plan, please consult your physician. The first week after surgery you should: Practice deep diaphragmatic breathing 5-6 times a day. While lying on your back take a slow, deep breath. Breathe in as much air as you possibly can while trying to expand your chest. Relax and breathe out slowly. Repeat this 4 or 5 times. This exercise will help maintain normal movement of your chest. Do breathing exercises indefinitely. Use your affected arm (on the side where your surgery was) as you normally would to comb your hair, bathe, brush your teeth, dressing and eating. Raise your affected arm above the level of your heart for 45 minutes, two or three times a day while lying down with your hand higher than your wrist and your elbow a little higher than your shoulder. This will help decrease the swelling that may happen after surgery.

Exercise your affected arm while it is elevated above the level of your heart by opening and closing your hand 15 to 25 times, then bend and straighten your elbow. Repeat this 3 or 4 times a day. Avoid sleeping on your affected arm or that side.

Once you have been released by your doctor to resume normal activities, pilates can be an integral part of your recovery process. A pilates instructor specially trained to work with breast cancer survivors can develop a gentle matwork program focusing on range of motion exercises for the entire shoulder girdle, establishing mobility, restoring posture and ensuring proper biomechanics to address muscular imbalances. Muscle guarding and spasm is a normal response to any injury including surgery. This guarding is not only painful but can lead to "frozen shoulder". Specific exercises can help stretch this tissue and prevent tightening of the affected arm.

The Pilates Edge, a STOTT PILATES® studio, has instructors who are trained to identify the different types of breast cancer surgeries and the side effects of each. It is important to work with a professional who can help you set realistic goals for increasing your physical activity level and who understands the specifics of your condition.

The Pilates Edge will be hosting a workshop on breast cancer rehab on October 3, 2008, which is open to all fitness professionals who wish to learn how to address the specific needs of breast cancer survivors. Space is limited.