



# WHAT OUR PHYSIOS DO

## WHAT OUR PHYSIOS DO *at*

**MENAI DISTRICT PHYSIOTHERAPY  
& SPORTS INJURY CENTRE**

# SHOULDER MANAGEMENT following breast cancer

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## UPPER LIMB MORBIDITY FOLLOWING BREAST CANCER MANAGEMENT

Early detection of breast cancer is leading to a decrease in mortality rates<sup>[1]</sup> however, even though mortality is decreasing, current breast cancer management is a process that often leaves women with disabling symptoms in the upper limb on the same side of breast cancer treatment<sup>[2]</sup>. When considering statistics such as:

- one in eleven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer before the age of seventy five<sup>[3]</sup>,
- breast cancer is the second most common cancer among Australian women, after skin cancer<sup>[3]</sup>,
- 11,791 women and 95 men were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001<sup>[1]</sup>.

It is clear that a wide section of women will be affected.

It has been shown that the type of surgery and whether radio or chemotherapy are used can indicate the likelihood of upper limb problems developing. The combination of axillary dissection and radiotherapy to the breast/axilla area are associated with a higher likelihood of morbidity following treatment<sup>[4,5]</sup>, however, shoulder/arm morbidity in women following any combination of breast cancer treatment is common.

Women post treatment can be affected by lymphoedema, arm/shoulder weakness, decreased range of movement and pain which in turn lead to women being unable to perform activities of daily living or severely hinders their performance<sup>[2]</sup>. These disabilities can lead to decreased self esteem, self worth, lead to withdrawal from normal activities and/or hobbies and hence lead to a decrease in quality of life<sup>[6,7]</sup>.

There is currently no physiotherapy protocol in place to prevent upper limb problems occurring, however, it

is clear that the problems mentioned above such as swelling, weakness and stiffness are all amenable to physiotherapy treatment. Programs aimed to specifically treat upper limb deficits or to prevent them occurring would greatly benefit these women and help them to return to pre-treatment activities such as work, sports, exercise and other hobbies which in turn can increase or maintain the patients self esteem and quality of life.

The staff at Menai District Physiotherapy are all aware of the problems that can occur post breast cancer treatment. Individualised programs targeted at maintaining or restoring upper limb and shoulder function can greatly benefit these women. Benefits are not only physical but also mental as women can resume their pre-treatment lifestyle with little or no deficiency.

### References

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