

This information leaflet gives you information about how to use a shoulder sling. Please note that this is for guidance only. Please contact your health professional for assistance should you have any questions or queries.

The type of surgery that you have undergone will dictate the length of time that you are required to support your arm in a sling. For some surgical procedures they are used for comfort only and to assist with managing your pain, whereas with others, resting in a sling for a set period is essential. The sling is designed to hold and protect your shoulder whilst it is healing.

Wearing the sling can often feel unnatural, uncomfortable and hot. It is, however, an **essential part of your recovery** and helps to ensure the best long term outcome for your shoulder.

Most slings are similar, however, the surgeon may request that you, additionally, use a waist strap and/or a small 'abduction' pillow to increase the support for your arm.

When applying your sling, ensure your shoulders are symmetrical.

Standard Shoulder Sling:

Once your sling is in position it should look like this:



How to apply:

In sitting support your arm on a pillow.



Slide your forearm into the sling ensuring the elbow is tucked into the corner of the sling.



Take the shoulder strap across your back and over your unaffected shoulder.



Place the strap through the metal loop and fold back on itself, attaching the Velcro.

Please note:

- The elbow should be tucked into the corner of your sling
- The wrist should be in line or slightly higher than the elbow
- The arm should feel that the sling is supporting it well.

Addition of a Waist Strap:

If your surgeon wishes you to use a waist strap for added protection following surgery, the sling can be applied in a similar manner to above. The waist strap attaches through a metal ring which is located on the inner aspect of the sling close to your body. The strap is then passed around your waist and attaches close to the elbow on the outside of your sling or through another hoop. The following pictures give examples.





Abduction Sling:



Your surgeon may request the use of an 'Abduction' brace to maintain your arm in a position, slightly away from your body. This can be applied in a similar manner to the shoulder sling above.

How can I shower?

You should avoid having a bath until the wounds are well healed. You may, however, have a shower as long as the force of the shower spray does not go directly onto the wounds. At first you may feel more comfortable having a wash rather than a shower, until your pain settles and you gain some confidence.

Remove your sling whilst showering but it is essential that you keep your arm **positioned across your stomach to protect it**. Do not use your affected arm for personal care.

How do I get dressed?

Getting dressed can seem difficult and complicated at first. The need to protect your shoulder and the pain from the surgery can make this challenging. It is often advisable to choose garments that open at the front with a zip or buttons as it is easier to feed your affected hand in first, followed by the unaffected arm. To do this sit at the front of a chair and allow your arm to hang down, as in the following photos:



Do I need to wear my sling all day and all night?

Unless you have been specifically told otherwise, you will require to wear your sling **all day and all night**. It can, however, be removed for showering, dressing or whilst doing your physiotherapy exercises.

When sitting it would be reasonable to take your arm out of your sling and rest it on a pillow or on your lap. Only do this in a safe environment.

The sling should always be used when being active and when sleeping as it is **essential to provide protection** to your shoulder.



It may be more comfortable, initially, to lie on your back or in a semi-sitting position with a pillow under your arm for support.

If you have any concerns regarding the information included in this leaflet, please ask your healthcare provider for advice.

Useful phone numbers

NHS Lothian switchboard: 0131 536 1000