

## **TWO SHOULDER REPLACEMENTS – PETA’S STORY**

“You need a new shoulder”, said my consultant. “What?” I had never heard of anyone having new shoulders before. Knees, yes. Hips, yes. But shoulders – no! I had an awful fright. That was in 2012. I chickened out. I had an arthroscopy which gave me relief for 2 years, but as predicted, I had to return to ask about a shoulder replacement. My lovely consultant introduced me to a lady who had had this operation and we met over coffee so she could tell me about it and show me how successful it had been. Since her operation, she has taken up golf, so I figured that if you could take up such a sport post-op, it must be successful if done by a specialist.

In October 2014, I had a right shoulder replacement and I am pleased to report that this has been very successful. I have 360 degrees of movement in both directions and no pain! Before going for the operation, I saw a physiotherapist and undertook an exercise regime. This was in addition to my daily swim which was by now just reduced to breaststroke (crawl and backstroke no longer possible). There was almost immediate relief from the pain and I was back doing a short gentle swim in just over 4 weeks and driving (I have an automatic). Exercises were undertaken religiously three times a day, and I made very good use of the ice band recommended by my consultant which had me off painkillers in about a week.

There are several things to consider before the operation of course. Clothing – pull on trousers, button-up tops and button-through nightdresses, and most important “front loading bras” – very essential when you have an arm in a sling. Being left-handed, I didn’t struggle too much with such matters as hair, teeth brushing or eating. I found light bedding best with lots of pillows to rest my arm/shoulder and prevent me from turning onto it during sleep.

I was warned that my left shoulder would need attention eventually. As it happened this was sooner than we both expected due to having had a left knee replacement in October 2015. Why? Well the only way I could get a little bit comfortable in bed was to lie on my left side and of course, I had to use a stick/crutch on the left too.

So in June 2016 I was back for a left shoulder replacement, exactly the same procedure but this time the anaesthetist used a “block” rather than a General. That was much better but I made sure that at no time was I awake during the operation! The left shoulder was in a sorry state and had started to “disintegrate” so my consultant had to remove some “loose marbles”. According to my friends, he is getting to know me too well if he can identify that I have loose marbles! The bruising was much more than before due to the ferreting for the “marbles” but I am a great believer in Arnica tablets which I took immediately I was awake and continued for the next 6 days and these certainly helped.

Being left-handed, I was more handicapped than before, but again, I had undertaken some physio, swum until almost the last minute and kept as active as I could. My left arm was “too heavy to lift” by the time of the operation and I am only now (6 weeks’ post-op) beginning to lift above shoulder height. But I am confident that I will have the same movement as in my right shoulder once I am swimming again and of course, being diligent with my exercises.

Out came the clothes I needed for the first shoulder replacement: some I needed to start wearing before the operation such as the front fastening bras. I started to practice using my right hand to drink coffee and eat, clean teeth and importantly, getting up from a chair or bed without using my left shoulder at least 4 weeks before the operation. I have needed more help with other domestic chores and found a tea towel very useful as a bib!!! I live alone so each time, my cousin has stayed to look after me and I have been very grateful for her help and kindness. I started to drive short distances at about 5 weeks and was helping with the washing up after 7 days.

My only concern now that I am pain free is that I will forget that I must not lift etc for 3 months and inadvertently use my dominant hand. The right shoulder and knee problems were the result of sports injuries when I was younger so I hope that I will not need any more bits and pieces of me replaced. I have been told that I am already quite valuable to a scrap metal merchant!

### ***August 2016 - Update***

It is now 8 weeks since my left shoulder replacement. It is wonderful to be out of pain and able to sleep at night. The “heaviness” in my arm is reducing and I can lift my arm above my head with just a little discomfort. I started swimming about 2 weeks ago. Breast-stroke only (very slowly) beginning with 10 lengths and adding 2 lengths of the pool each day. I am now up to half a mile (32 lengths) which takes about 40-45 minutes and I can already feel the benefit of this exercise. I hope to return to crawl and backstroke in about 4 weeks, again starting off slowly and building up the lengths. I have also continued with the exercises prescribed by the physiotherapist.

Oddly, I have continued to use my right non-dominant hand for many tasks, such as drinking, which is something I would never have done before. I intend to try to continue to use my right hand as much as possible as to become more ambidextrous might be useful in the future as I am 70 years old soon. I occasionally catch myself picking up the shopping with my left arm which I must not do for at least another 4 weeks. But it is the little achievements which have given me much pleasure. For the first time in 3 months, I was able to wear stud ear-rings, style my hair and wear a normal bra - though I think I will always have to be a “twizzler” when putting it on!

### ***September – Discharged!***

Well my consultant was very pleased with my progress and has discharged me! I still have a bit of work to do so will be continuing with the physiotherapy and exercises for a while longer and then maybe I will be able to do up my bra behind my back. The swimming has helped tremendously and I am back to swimming a kilometre using crawl and backstroke, albeit slower than before. But that gives me something to aim for. I have started to record my swimming efforts – see below. I have also bought some hand paddles to strengthen the shoulders but have yet to try them.



So what have I learnt from this experience? I am still regarded as an alien from Mars when I tell people that I have two false shoulders. It really is not an operation which is widely known but I am very thankful that it exists. Three joint replacements in as many years was rather “greedy” and I do hope that I won’t need any more!

Have I become more patient? Nope! That will never be one of my virtues. But I have learned to be grateful for the kindness of others. My “cousin nurse”; physiotherapist Claire; girls in the gym for helping me dress, and of course Michelle for her encouragement and support by private emails. I am sure her operation will be equally successful as she has shown so much dogged determination. Of course most appreciation goes to my kind and skilful consultant and his lovely secretary who have helped and supported me over the years. The only drawback now is that I won’t be seeing them again – hopefully!