

Thoracic Surgery Patients

Instructions for home care following your thoracic surgery

Surgeon: _____

Procedure & date: _____

Diet: Maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet. It will be important to maintain adequate calorie intake especially protein to help the healing process. If you were on a special diet before your surgery you should maintain that regimen at home (example: diabetic diet, low cholesterol). It is important to drink plenty of fluids, unless otherwise instructed, to keep the mucous membranes thin and easy to cough out.

Exercise: Continue a daily exercise program as you recover. You will notice you need regular periods of rest through out the day as you regain your strength and stamina. It can take as long as **four to six weeks** to fully recover and return to your baseline activity level. Walking is the best type of exercise to help expedite your recovery. Also, continue to use your incentive spirometer once at home. Deep breathing and coughing exercises help to fully expand your lungs and mobilize any secretions from your lungs that have developed. These exercises are described in further detail below. Some routine shoulder exercises have been included at the end of this informational pamphlet. It will be important to continue these exercises at home to prevent any lose in your mobility and flexibility.

Deep breathing and coughing exercises:

Perform at least 3 times/day for approximately **10 minutes**.

1. Sit in an upright position leaning slightly forward with your feet flat on the floor or lying on your side with your knees bent toward your stomach.
2. Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth which helps loosen the secretions in your lungs. Repeat this a few times (3 - 5 times) and then take a deep breath in and cough several times as you breathe out and repeat.
3. It will be important to pace yourself with this exercise and to take your time to avoid getting tired or winded too quickly.

Restrictions: There are few restrictions once you are home. You can do most anything that does not overly exert your body. You will fatigue easily which is to be expected. You will not hurt your incision or your lungs. We prefer that you do not lift, push or pull anything heavier than **10 pounds** until your post-operative visit. You should refrain from any weight lifting. You can return to sexual activity when you feel ready. You are **not** restricted from walking stairs.

Driving: It is best to avoid driving a car until you are cleared by your surgeon at your post-operative visit. Because of the surgical incisions you may not be able to react in a timely manner while driving, which can put you at risk and the other cars on the road. You should refrain from driving especially while taking any type of narcotic for pain relief.

Sleep: Sleep is a very important component to your overall recovery. Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep at night. It is not unusual to have difficulty sleeping for the first few weeks. As you recover your sleep patterns will improve. Taking your pain medications right before you go to bed may help. You can sleep in any position you find comfortable unless specific recommendations were given to you prior to discharge. Do not be afraid to lie on the same side as your incision if that is most comfortable for you.

Shower: You can shower 24 hours after your chest tube was removed. At that time, it will be ok to remove any bandages that might remain. You may notice a suture where the chest tube was removed. This will be removed at the time of your post-operative office visit with your surgeon.

Care of the Incision: There should be minimal care involved with your incisions. You can keep a dry sterile dressing or band-aid over the incision since there might be some clear yellow or pinkish drainage for a few days after you return home. Some of your incisions may have steri-strips (butterfly bandages) in place which can be removed after 5-7 days. It is best to remove them when your incision is wet to minimize any discomfort.

When to call your surgeon: You should call whenever you have any questions or concerns related to your surgery. It is best to call during regular business hours when the office is fully staffed and best equipped to help you. During off-hours, the answering service will help contact the surgeon. For your routine medical problems you should contact your primary care physician. Important things to focus on:

Incisions: if you notice any increasing redness, swelling, thick yellow/greenish drainage from your incisions, call your surgeon's office.

Temperature: Anything greater than 101.5 should be called to the attention of your surgeon's office.

Secretions: If you notice your secretions becoming thick or turning from clear to yellow/green, contact your surgeon's office.

Symptoms: if you develop significant shortness of breath or worsening chest pain, call your surgeon's office.

Remember the importance of **continued smoking cessation** or talking with your primary care physician about a smoking cessation program. Continued smoking especially during your recovery will significantly delay your recovery and may lead to complications.

Your **post-operative visit** will be important for the surgeon to assess your progress and also to discuss any further therapy/treatment that might be required for your overall care.