



---

## *Information for You from Your Health Care Team*

### **Discharge Instructions for Thoracotomy**

#### **Activity:**

- You have had a surgery on your lung through a traditional large incision and had a rib cut.
- Your activity is limited to lifting less than 10 pounds on the side of your incision for 4-6 weeks.
- Please be sure to do the physical therapy exercises you were taught.
- You should walk inside or outside of your home and do small tasks.
- Be active and do as much of your normal routine as you can. Go up and down stairs, walk as much as possible, go out as you like. When tired, take a nap
- Avoid sitting with your legs down for long periods of time.
- Keeping active will help prevent blood clots from forming in the veins of your legs.
- You should not drive for at least 4 weeks.
- You can ride in a car and should wear a seatbelt.
- Use your incentive spirometer, breathing toy at least 5 times a day until your follow-up appointment.

#### **Incision Care:**

- Shower when you get home. Daily showering will help to prevent infection.
- Do not use highly perfumed or scented soap, lotion, creams, or ointments on your incisions.
- The dressing from your chest drain site should stay in place for 48 hours after the tube is removed.
- If showering, cover any dressings with saran wrap or take dressings off if it is time to for it to be removed.
- Pat dry after washing with mild soap and water and recover with a dressing if still draining.
- Remove the chest tube dressing on \_\_\_\_\_. Place a dry gauze or band-aid over the site until there is no drainage or a scab forms.
- Cover any incisions that weep fluid with gauze.
- Clear drainage from your incisions is ok, if you see pus and, or you develop a fever call your doctor.
- Do not be surprised if the incision where the chest drain was suddenly drains fluid at home. It may seem to be a lot of fluid drainage and may be yellow or pink. If you have no shortness of breath along with the drainage and it does not look like pus thick, white or tan, do not worry. Cover the incision again with gauze.
- If you have steri strips small pieces of tape over the incision, remove them 7 to10 days after your surgery.

- If you do not have steri-strips over your incisions, you may have clear skin glue (Dermabond).
- Dermabond will flake off as your skin grows. This may take 3 to 5 weeks after surgery.

#### **Nutrition:**

- Be sure to eat well to promote healing.
- Specific diets are provided by the nutrition department depending on your needs.

#### **Medicines:**

- You will receive a list of the medicines that you should take at home.
- You may be sent home with different medicines or dosages than you were taking before surgery.
- Your surgeon will review your medicines at your first postoperative clinic visit or you can review your medicine with your primary care provider after you are discharged.
- Bring your pill bottles or the list of your medicines with you to your first clinic appointment with your surgeon after surgery.
- If you were started on a beta blocker metoprolol or atenolol around the time of your surgery, continue taking it until you see your surgeon at your first postoperative clinic visit.
- If you developed an irregular heart rhythm during your hospital stay and were started on new medicines including a blood thinner, you will need to stay on these at least 3 months.
- Blood thinner medicine pills, warfarin, coumadin will need to be monitored by blood testing. Doses of this medicine are different for each person. A dietician will review the diet you should eat while on blood thinner pills.
- Pain medicines are usually sent home with you and should be the same medicines you were taking during the later part of your hospital stay.
- If you have a lot of pain after surgery, take your medicine. Do not wait because it will be harder for the medicine to control the pain.
- If your pain is decreasing and you do not need the same dose of pain medicine days, decreasing the amount of medicine you are taking. You can take 1 pill at a time instead of 2, or increase the amount of time between doses of pain medicine.
- Do not drive, drink alcohol, or operate heavy machinery while taking narcotic pain medicines.
- Narcotic pain medicines can cause constipation. You should have a bowel movement within 5 days after your operation.
- We suggest the following steps to prevent constipation:
  - Drink plenty of liquids.
  - Limit liquids that contain caffeine to one or two drinks per day.
  - Use Colace Docusate 100mg two times a day.
  - You may also add Metamucil two times a day.
  - Use Senna at bedtime as a laxative.
  - Eat prunes or drink prune juice daily.
  - If constipated more than two days, take 2 tablespoons of Milk of Magnesia in the morning.

- Pain in the area of the incisions is very normal. You may have pain that starts weeks after the surgery. The pain can also be located in the front of the chest, even though your incisions are in another place. The pain can be tingling or burning. It may also feel numb. This is the nerves healing and will go away after some time.

Call for:

- Temperature of 101.5 or greater.
- Pus draining from your incisions.
- Shortness of breath.

You have an appointment with Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.  
At this follow-up appointment you will\_\_\_ will not\_\_\_ have a Chest X-Ray.  
Please bring a list of questions at the time of your visit.

**Speak Up If You Have Any Questions or Concerns**

10/2007  
Reviewed January 2009