

THORACIC SURGERY

HOME INSTRUCTIONS

DANGER SIGNALS TO WATCH FOR AT HOME

Call your Doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Increased drainage or change in color of drainage from your wound site
- Increased redness, swelling at the wound site
- Fever of 101.5 or 38.5 (or higher)
- Nausea, vomiting
- Pain that is not well controlled
- Increasing or severe shortness of breath

WHEN YOU CAN RESUME YOUR USUAL ACTIVITIES

Exercise:

- Walking is the best exercise. Staying out of bed is to your advantage during your recovery
- Walk as much as you can reasonably tolerate, gradually increasing the pace and distance
- You may climb stairs at home as part of your daily activity. Take your time and rest if you become tired or short of breath
- We encourage you to continue to cough and deep breathe as you have done in the hospital
- Use the Incentive Spirometer for two sessions in the morning and two sessions in the afternoon (ten breaths each session)
- A family member or friend can perform chest clapping approximately 4 times a day for up to a week

Driving:

- After a thoracotomy and/or laparotomy, do not drive until you have seen your Surgeon in his/her office. This will be approximately 14 days after discharge
- Pain medication will make you drowsy and it may also be painful for you to move your arms when turning the steering wheel. Both of these factors make driving dangerous for several weeks after your operation
- Your Doctor will instruct you when it will be safe for you to drive
- After Thoracoscopy (an operation through small incisions using video equipment and telescopes) do not drive until you are off of pain medication during the day and you feel comfortable using your arms. This usually occurs after one week or longer

Lifting:

- Do not lift anything over 10 pounds for a minimum of six to eight weeks following discharge from the hospital

Work:

- The decision to return to work needs to be made jointly between you and your surgeon. Generally, you will need 6-8 weeks to recover after your surgery before you are able to return to work.

Diet:

- You may return to your normal diet at home, unless otherwise instructed by your Doctor

Bathing:

- You may take a shower, but not a bath starting 48 hours your chest tubes were removed
- Simply let the water run over your incisions and gently dry them afterward
- If you are at home with your chest tube still in place, continue to sponge bathe and avoid showering until 48 hours after your chest tube has been removed
- Observe your chest tube site and the wound for any increase in drainage, redness or swelling

Dressing site care:

(Prior to changing any dressing, the person changing the dressing should wash their hands thoroughly.)

1. Chest tube site dressing (if present)
 - The dressing covering your chest tube drain site should not be disturbed until 48 hours after the chest tube has been removed, even if there is some drainage on the dressing
 - If the dressing becomes saturated, simply reinforce it with additional gauze until 48 hours after the chest tube has been removed
 - Following the 48 hours after the chest tube has been removed you can gently peel the tape off and remove the dressing
 - If there is still some drainage, you may cover the area again with a light gauze pad and tape or Band-Aid.
 - After removing the dressing, you may begin taking showers (NO BATHS). Simply let the water run over your incisions and gently dry them afterward
 - Sutures and staples are usually removed prior to discharge from the hospital. If you have any remaining sutures or staples, these will be removed during your first post-operative visit with your Surgeon
 - You may gently remove any loose Steri-Strips after taking a shower
 - If you have returned home with your chest tube in place, the dressing should be changed daily and covered with gauze and tape

Medications:

- You may start taking the medications you took prior to surgery unless directed otherwise by your physician (Should you have questions about this please ask your physician prior to discharge)
- You may be taking pain medication whose main side effects are constipation and drowsiness

- It is essential for you to maintain an adequate fruit and fluid intake as well as stool softeners and/or laxatives in order to avoid constipation
- You may also experience nightmares, hallucinations and sweating from these medications
- Some medications such as Percocet and Vicodin contain Tylenol. Avoid taking these medications more frequently than directed; too much Tylenol can cause liver damage. Do NOT take over-the-counter products that contain Tylenol/Acetaminophen if you are already on these medications.
- If you are unsure if a medication is safe ask your physician.

MEDICATION SIDE EFFECTS TO WATCH FOR:

SEE MEDICATION SHEETS

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR THORACIC SURGERY PATIENTS

Wellness Community

www.la.wellnesscommunity.org

(310) 314-2555

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

1-800-4-cancer

Cancer Care

www.cancercare.org

1-800-813-HOPE

(4673)

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

1-800-ACS-2345

ALCASE (Alliance for Lung Cancer,
Advocacy, Support & Education)

www.alcase.org

1-800-298-2436

American Lung
Association

www.lungusa.org

1-800-LUNG-USA

(586-4872)