

Patient's Name:

LEEDS GENERAL INFIRMARY

PHYSIOTHERAPY DEPARTMENT

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS UNDERGOING THORACIC SURGERY

Physiotherapy plays an important role in your recovery following thoracic surgery.

The physiotherapist helps by:

- Ensuring the lungs remain clear and well expanded.
- Teaching exercises to maintain and improve circulation and joint mobility.
- Encouraging early mobility as soon as possible after surgery.
- Offering advice on exercise and activities after discharge from hospital.

Chest problems may occur after thoracic surgery for the following reasons:

- Anaesthetic gases increase the amount of secretions on the chest.
- The nature of the operation itself directly affects the lungs.
- In the early stages whilst still on bedrest, the tendency is to breathe shallowly without an occasional deep breath or sigh.
- The discomfort from the chest wound will automatically inhibit a deep breath.
- Any existing chest problems including smoking will increase the amount of secretions present and could limit lung expansion.

In order to speed your recovery and prevent any chest problems occurring, it is essential that you practise the following breathing exercises with special attention to expanding the lower part of your chest. It is also important that any phlegm is coughed and expectorated to prevent a chest infection. Depending on your operation, you may or may not be treated by a physiotherapist during the post-operative period but you can continue with these exercises independently.

Breathing Exercise

Sit in a good upright position. Relax on your shoulders.

Take a deep breath in (you should feel the sides of your lower chest move outwards).

Hold for the count of 3.

Breathe out normally. Repeat 5 times.

Huffing

Next, take a medium sized breath in then “huff” out as though you were steaming up a mirror. A huff is a short, sharp breath out to help clear phlegm.

Coughing

Good effective coughing is extremely important to clear phlegm from your chest. It should be repeated after each set of breathing exercises.

Coughing will not do any damage to your wound or the surgery but you may feel more comfortable if you support your wound. This can be done by using either hands, a small pad or towel. Take a deep breath in and then cough hard. Any phlegm can then be disposed of into a pot or tissues.

It is important to take regular pain relief in the first few days following your operation to ensure it is not painful when you cough. If you have a patient controlled analgesia system (PCAS) make sure you regularly press the button or ask the nurse for painkillers as you need them.

Circulatory Exercises

When lying in bed, you can try these circulatory exercises:

- Wiggle your toes.
- Pull your toes up towards you then push them away again.
- Tighten the muscle at the front of your thigh to make your leg really straight. Hold for a count of 3 then relax.
- Bend your knee, sliding your heel towards your bottom.

Mobility

Early mobilisation is a very important part of your recovery. Most patients get up for the first time the day after surgery and spend a short time sat out in the chair. Walking generally commences as soon as possible and this will improve your circulation, encourage deep breathing and begin to increase your exercise tolerance. If you have chest drains on suction after your operation, you may not be allowed to disconnect them to mobilise. In this case, regular marching on the spot is encouraged. Distance of mobilising will gradually be increased during your stay and on discharge from hospital so by 6-8 weeks you can aim to walk 1-2 miles a day. A physiotherapist may also use the exercise bike as part of your post-operative exercise plan to increase your exercise tolerance. Advice on using this will be given accordingly.

Shoulder Exercises

You may commence the following exercises after your operation to ensure your arm doesn't become stiff. All exercises should be carried out at a slow and even pace, one arm at a time and repeated 10 times.

1. Lift your arms up straight forward above your head. If one arm feels stiff, use the other arm to help it move.
2. Take your arm out to the side until it reaches your ear.
3. Reach behind your back and imagine you are trying to scratch your back.
4. Take your arm up behind your head as if you were brushing your hair.

If you have any further questions, please ask to see the physiotherapist when you come in for your operation.

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