

Tips on a speedier recovery following thoracic surgery

Information for patients



Walking

After your operation it is important to get up and walk around. The nurses will help you on the first day with your drips and drains but once you are safe, keep walking yourself. You can use the yellow walking signs positioned around the ward to guide you.

Position in bed

If you are required to spend long periods in bed, ensure you are in a good position. This means sitting upright in bed or lying on your side.

Do not slump in bed.

Pain relief

Ensure that your pain is under control. Some discomfort is normal, but if it is affecting your breathing or movement, ask the nurse to provide you with more pain relief.

Rest

Although you should get up and move around as soon as possible, it is also important that you rest when you are feeling tired.

Breathing exercises

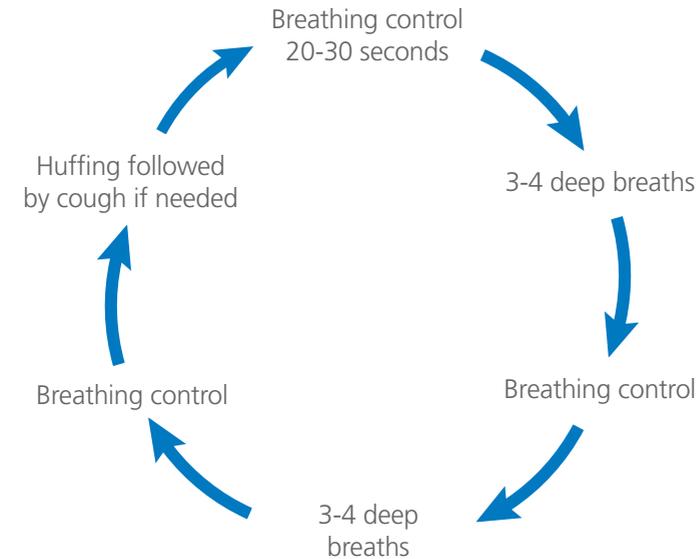
Initially, due to pain and tiredness, deep breathing may be difficult. This can lead to closure of small areas in your lungs. Phlegm may also build up and can cause a chest infection. To avoid this you need to do breathing exercises every hour.

The Active Cycle of Breathing (ACBT) is a breathing technique used to clear phlegm and re-inflate your lungs.

Firstly, find a comfortable well supported position. Ideally sat out in the chair or upright sitting in bed. Relax your neck, upper chest, shoulders and arms.

There are three parts to ACBT:

- Breathing control
- Deep breaths
- Huff or cough



Breathing control

- Rest your hand lightly on your stomach
- Breathe in and out quietly and gently through your nose if you can
- As you breathe in, your stomach should rise

Deep breaths

- Deep breaths help to get the air behind the sputum that is stuck in your airways. Try to hold each deep breath for the count of three as this will also help to re-inflate your lungs.
- Take a long, slow deep breath in through your nose and out gently through your mouth.
- Try to breathe right down to the bottom of your lungs, expanding your ribcage.
- Aim to do three to four deep breaths before returning to breathing control.

You may need to do a few cycles of deep breathing and breathing control before doing a huff (see below) if your phlegm is sticky.

Huff

- A huff is similar to a cough but you aim to keep your mouth and throat open.
- Imagine you are trying to steam a mirror right in front of you.
- Take a breath in and then exhale the air out forcefully through an open mouth.
- If you wheeze as you exhale you are huffing too hard.

Cough

After doing a huff you may need to do a good strong cough and bring your phlegm out into a pot or tissue. When coughing always use a rolled up towel to support your wound.

Coughing

Coughing is important after an operation to clear phlegm from your lungs and prevent a chest infection. Coughing may feel uncomfortable. Supporting your wound with a towel and then coughing will be more comfortable.

Circulatory exercises

These exercises will improve the circulation in your legs and are important to reduce the risk of blood clots. You should do these exercises three times a day, when you are in bed or sitting on a chair.

Straight leg raise

- Lie on the bed with your legs straight or if you are sat in a chair slowly straighten one leg.
- Lift one leg up.
- Keeping your leg straight, draw your foot towards you and hold for five seconds.
- Repeat five times on each side.

Knee bend and straighten

- Sitting on a chair or in bed, bend and straighten your leg ten times on each side.

Ankle circles

- Move your foot in a circle, repeating ten times with each foot.

Bottom squeeze

- Squeeze the muscles in your bottom and hold for five seconds. Repeat five times.

Marching on the spot

- Sit on a chair and march on the spot ten times.

Continuing recovery at home

Going home after a major operation is usually a welcome experience. However, it can also be quite daunting, and you may be feeling apprehensive. Exercising after your operation will help your recovery and allow a quicker return to a normal daily life.

These exercises are important in order to prevent the scar causing a stiff shoulder.

Upper body exercises

It is important that you make time to do the following exercises at least twice a day. Each exercise is designed to stretch a different part of the upper body.

1. Take the operated arm up above the head and then lower down.

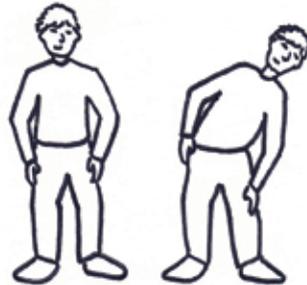
Repeat ten times.



2. Bend to one side sliding your hand down your leg.

Return to the middle and then repeat on the opposite side.

Repeat ten times.



3. Sit in a chair.

Put your hands on your shoulders.

Turn to look left and right alternatively.

Keep your elbows at shoulder height and your back straight.

Repeat 10 times.



Walking

Walking is an excellent form of exercise not only for your muscles but also for your heart and lungs. As a guideline, go for a short walk for about five minutes. If you feel fine build up your time by five minutes a day until you are walking for one to two miles a day.

You should be able to talk at the same time as walking. If you are unable to do this you are probably doing too much and need to cut back slightly.

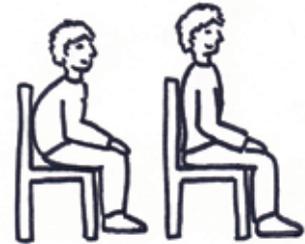
Sport

Swimming and cycling are excellent exercises and can be started once your wound has fully healed. This will take about six to eight weeks. If you would like advice about other sports please ask your consultant or GP.

Posture

It is easy to develop poor posture after an operation. It is important to stand and sit straight at all times to prevent this and use both sides of your body as normal.

You can correct your posture by making sure you are standing straight in front of a mirror.



Heavy lifting

You will be able to manage light work around the house, in the garden and at work when you feel fit and able. However, avoid any heavy lifting for the first six weeks after your operation.

If your job involves heavy lifting ask for advice from your consultant at your first outpatient appointment.

Activities like vacuuming, mowing the lawn and carrying shopping should be avoided for the first two to three weeks. Excessive activity will cause pain rather than actual damage, this is nature's way of telling you to slow down.

Contact

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If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or audio, please call **023 8120 4688 for help.**

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