

Patient information factsheet

Tips on a speedier recovery after an operation

We have given you this factsheet because you have had an operation and are currently in hospital recovering. It explains what to expect after your operation and gives tips and exercises to help speed up your recovery.

Pain relief

Ensuring that you have adequate pain control after having an operation is essential. It is normal to experience some mild discomfort. However, if it's affecting your breathing or movement, ask your nurse for more pain relief.

Walking

The most important thing after your operation is for you to get up and out of bed, and walk around.

Walking is the best way to help to loosen your phlegm after an operation and will also help to prevent you from developing a chest infection. On the day of your operation, the nurses will help you to sit out of bed, even if you have drips and drains attached to you.

We will expect you to start walking the day after your operation.

Rest

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

Position in bed

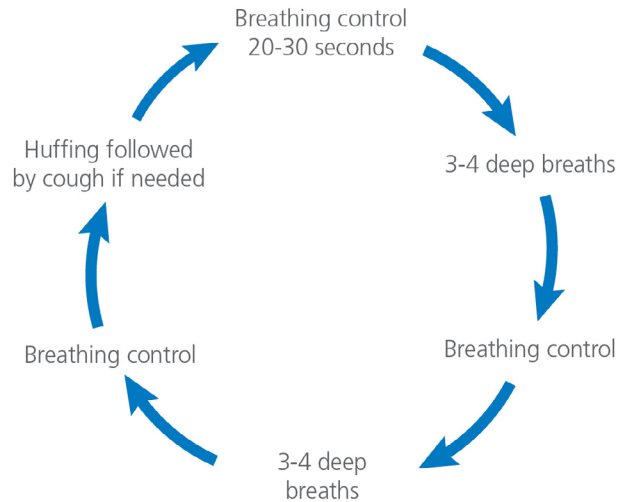
If you need to spend long periods of time in bed, ensure you are in a good position. This means sitting upright or lying on your side. Do not slump in bed.

Breathing exercises

Initially, due to pain and tiredness, you may find deep breathing and coughing difficult. This can lead to small areas of collapse in the base of your lungs. Phlegm may also build up and this can cause you to have a chest infection.

To avoid this, do breathing exercises every hour until you are independently mobile.

Follow the cycle of breathing exercises on the next page.



1. Breathing control – relaxed breathing

Start by doing breathing control. Lightly rest your hand on your stomach. Breathe in and out quietly and gently through your nose, if you can. You should see your stomach rise as you breathe in. Do this for as long as you need to. If you are quite breathless, you may need to do breathing control for longer until your breathing settles.

2. Deep breaths

Take a long, slow deep breath in through your nose, if you can. Breathe out gently through your mouth. Try to breathe right down to the bottom of your lungs, expanding your rib cage.

Aim to do three to five deep breaths before returning to breathing control.

3. Breathing control

Return to breathing control for as long as you need to, until your breathing is slow and relaxed.

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

4. Huff

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

5. Cough

After doing a huff you may need to do a good strong cough and bring your phlegm out into a pot or tissue.

Coughing is important after an operation to clear any phlegm from your lungs and help prevent a chest infection. Coughing may feel uncomfortable, however, supporting your wound with a towel when coughing should make it more comfortable.

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Circulatory exercises

These exercises will improve the circulation in your legs and are important to reduce the risk of blood clots. While in hospital, 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.

Arm exercises

These exercises will maintain the range of movement in your upper body and alleviate tension.

Shoulder shrugs

Shrug your shoulders upwards, quickly release and relax the shoulders so that they drop. Repeat five times.

Shoulder circles

Move your shoulders in a circle. Repeat five times.

Arm raises

Lift your arm forwards and upwards above your head. Repeat five times on each arm.

Remember, the most important thing is to get up and walking as soon as possible. If you think you'll struggle when you get home with getting about, with personal care or with looking after yourself, please ask your nurse to refer to your ward occupational therapist.

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