

LOUISE MALONE

Physiotherapy after chest surgery

Chest surgery is usually performed through small cuts in the skin (keyhole surgery) or through the side and back (open surgery). After this type of surgery, many will experience pain, reduced lung volume, small areas of lung collapse, poor posture, ineffective cough, retained secretions and shoulder pain. Thankfully, Physiotherapy can help prevent and overcome these main problems.

The following strategies are important to help your recovery from chest surgery.

Pain relief

Often, many of us are reluctant to take pain medication. However immediately after surgery it is very important to take the prescribed pain medication. Breathing and moving are the best ways to optimise recovery and good pain controlled allows you to take deep breaths and helps manage breathing function and allows you to move. Breathing and moving well, will ensure a quicker return to normal and reduce anxiety.

Posture/positioning

The easiest way to improve the function of the lungs after surgery is to optimise posture/positioning. Your lungs function best when they are in the upright position so adapt upright sitting, standing and walking postures. When sleeping, lie on the unaffected side to ensure the operated side is not compressed.

Breathing

Breathing should go back to near normal levels after lung surgery. It is important to expand the lungs after surgery through deep breathing exercises. Do this sitting in an upright position. Firstly, breathe in through the nose then breathe out with the lips shaped in an "O". Whilst breathing; put your hand on the stomach. It should lift on the inhale and sink down on the exhale. By doing this throughout the day it will help you get your breathing back to normal faster.

Supportive cough

Supporting your wound site whilst coughing, sneezing, taking a deep breath or doing breathing exercise will protect the wound and reduce the pain. Do this by using a rolled-up towel and firmly but gently, press it over the wound site using both hands when you feel the need to cough or sneeze. It is important that you can cough effectively to remove unwanted sputum, this will reduce the risk of collapse of small areas in the lung and chest infection.

Gentle movement

Moving helps the lungs fill with air and circulates blood around the body. Aim to walk short distances from the day of surgery, and gradually extend the distance you walk every day. Gentle movement of the arms help loosen the shoulder joint, muscles, and surgical scar tissue. To do this, interlace the

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fingers, raise both arms above the head on an inhale breath, gentle bring them back down on the exhale. Repeat this at least ten times a day, or more often if you can.

You should be able to perform many of these exercises yourself, but if you have any difficulties or need further advice, then do contact your physiotherapist.

(This article is published in the My Cancer Companion App. My Cancer Companion is a free app providing the best, up-to-date and authoritative information for people with lung cancer and pleural mesothelioma).

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