

Discharge Instructions – After Thoracic Surgery

Please read and follow these instructions carefully. They explain how to continue your care at home.

Diet

Resume your normal diet, unless your surgeon instructs otherwise. If you are having problems with bloating, avoid carbonated beverages, they often cause bloating.

Wound Care

- **After 48 hours, you may remove the dressing over your chest tube site and shower.** You can get the incision and drain sites wet in the shower by allowing soapy water to run over them. Pat dry both areas. If you still have gauze over your incision the site where your chest tube was, remove it before you shower and throw it away. You do not have to put the gauze back on after you shower. If you want to, you can cover the incisions with dry gauze and tape or a bandage. If you do, use new gauze and tape every day.
- Do not put the incision underwater for a long period of time. (Do not swim, take a bath, or sit in a hot tub.)
- Some of your incisions may be glued closed or have steristrips. **Do NOT pull off the glue or steristrips; they will come off on their own.**

Activity Restrictions/Exercise

- You can resume normal activity (walking, climbing stairs etc.) but **no strenuous exercise for at least 6 weeks.** You can discuss when that would be appropriate at your follow up appointment.
- **LIFTING:** VATS PATIENTS: No restrictions. THORACOTOMY PATIENTS: **Do not lift** more than 10 pounds for at least 6 weeks.
- **DRIVING:** VATS PATIENTS: No driving if you are taking opioid pain medication. THORACOTOMY PATIENTS: No driving until after your follow-up appointment, especially if you are still taking opioid pain medication.

Pain Management/Medications

- Take pain medication as instructed, when needed.
- Do not drive or operate heavy machinery while taking opioid (narcotic) pain medications (Norco®, Percocet®, Vicodin®, Lortab®), muscle relaxants (Flexeril®), or sedatives (Xanax® or Valium®).
- Note: All opioid pain medications can cause constipation. Stool softeners and mild laxatives may be helpful. Drinking 2-3 quarts of fluid a day and moving around may also help.
- If you no longer choose to take narcotic pain medications, you may take a non-prescription medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®). Do not take acetaminophen at the same time you take narcotic pain medications that contain acetaminophen (Norco®, Percocet®, Vicodin®, and Lortab®). Do not take ibuprofen if you have a history of ulcer, stomach problems, or bleeding.

Travel

If you have a long car ride home - or back to Roswell Park for follow up appointments - we recommend you make frequent stops (every hour) and get out and walk a bit. Please discuss air travel restrictions with your surgeon.

Oxygen

You may need oxygen when you go home. This will be set up by our Respiratory Therapy department. They will give you their own home oxygen instructions and show you how to use the portable tanks at home. It is your responsibility to call the oxygen company when you are leaving so they can set up your home unit. If you have any issues or problems with the unit once you get home, you will need to call the home oxygen company. Wear the unit as instructed and wear it to your follow up clinic appointment where we will review your oxygen needs.

Follow-Up

- If your follow-up appointment has not been scheduled or you need to change your scheduled appointment, please call **716-845-3167**.
- You should be seen 7-14 days after surgery, depending on the type of surgery you had.

When to Call

If you have difficulty breathing and/or have shortness of breath, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency department. If you go to the ER or are admitted to the hospital, let your Roswell doctor know.

Call us **immediately if you have:** .

- signs of infection: redness that spreads beyond the incision; increased pain or tenderness, foul smelling odor, drainage with pus, or swelling at the incision, and/or a fever above 101°F (38.3°C). Please note: A low-grade temperature (less than 101°F) is normal after surgery. Continue doing your deep breathing exercises and walk frequently. Call the office if your temperature stays above 101°F.
- Check the chest tube site for signs of excessive drainage. Some clear yellow drainage and large amounts/gushing when you cough or sneeze is normal. Having large amounts of foul smelling or pus-like drainage is NOT normal and you should call the thoracic service immediately.

Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.: **716-845-3167**.

Evenings, weekends, and holidays: **716-845-2300** and our Call Center staff will assist you.

If it is determined you need to be seen, we may ask you to come to the Assessment and Treatment Center (ATC). The ATC is open 24/7. You must have a referral from your Roswell provider or the doctor on call. **This is not a walk-in clinic.**

If you have any questions or con, please call your doctor/Center during office hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.) at **716-845-3167**.