

Exercise After Lung Surgery with Thoracotomy Incision

To help you live a healthy, active life

Your health care providers advise you to exercise regularly as part of your recovery. Talk with your physical therapist or primary health care provider about the details of your exercise program.

This handout will help guide you while you recover after surgery. It also explains how to increase your activities safely.

Be Careful After Surgery

After surgery, you will need to follow incision precautions for:

- Your right arm
- Your left arm
- Both arms

Follow these precautions for:

- **4 weeks** if you have an incision on 1 side
- **6 weeks** if you have incisions on both sides



Ask for help doing tasks like carrying laundry or going grocery shopping.

DO NOT do these things with your arm(s) on the side(s) your incision(s) are on:

- Lift, push, pull, or carry anything that weighs more than 15 pounds. This may include pets, children, garbage, laundry, and groceries (a gallon of milk weighs 8 pounds.)
- Unscrew tight lids or open heavy doors.
- Reach above shoulder level. For example, do not reach for items on a high shelf in the kitchen or a closet.
- Reach behind you, since this will stretch your incision(s). For example, do not lean back on your arm(s) or reach behind you to wipe after using the toilet.
- Vacuum, garden, rake, or mow the lawn.
- Drive a car or truck. Your reaction time is slower and you are at higher risk for injuring your chest area.

For 3 months after surgery, DO NOT:

- Run, walk, or bike vigorously.
- Play sports like tennis, golf, softball, swimming, or bowling, or do any other sport that could cause injury to your chest area.

Add or Keep Exercise in Your Lifestyle

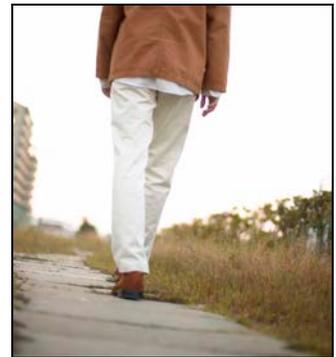
Talk with your doctor about when you can begin to exercise. The right exercise will help you:

- Recover from your surgery
- Decrease your back, shoulder, and chest muscle pain
- Increase your endurance and your body's efficiency
- Maintain mobility and muscle tone
- Control your blood pressure
- Lose weight
- Sleep better

Exercise Goals

Slowly work up to walking at least **30 minutes, total, every day.**

- Start by walking 3 times a day for about 5 minutes each time. Each week, increase the total time you walk by about 3 minutes until you are walking for a total of 30 minutes a day.
- Warm up and cool down for 5 minutes before and after you walk by doing exercises (see exercise handout), or by walking more slowly.
- Remember to add in the time for your return trip. Do not walk until you are tired.
- Exercise at a moderate level of effort (3 to 5 on a scale of 0 to 10)
- Wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothes.
- Wait 1 hour after you eat to exercise.



Slowly work up to walking at least 30 minutes, total, every day.

- Walk on flat ground.
- It is OK to walk on a treadmill at a slow speed (3.0 mph or less).

Pay Attention to Your Body

Slow down if:

- Your body is working at more than a moderate level of effort (greater than 5 on a scale of 0 to 10).
- For more than 10 minutes after you STOP exercising, you are very short of breath or your pulse is 20 beats per minute higher than when you started exercising.
- You cannot sleep, or you feel more tired than normal the day after you exercise.
- You have arthritis and it flares up, or you feel pain in your joints, heels, or calf muscles.
- You have increased swelling in your legs or feet.

Do not exercise if:

- You have a cold, flu, or fever.
- You have diabetes and it is out of control.
- You feel extreme emotional stress or you are much more tired than normal.

Call your doctor if:

- You have pain or pressure in your chest, arms, or throat.
- You are dizzy, lightheaded, have blurry vision, or feel faint.
- You are confused or suddenly clumsy.

If you need medical care right away, call 9-1-1.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Your physical therapist will answer your questions about exercise during your therapy sessions in the hospital.

Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns about your medical care.