

Activities of Daily Living After Lung Surgery

Self-care for safety and healing

This handout gives important guidelines to follow to help your healing and keep you safe after lung surgery. It includes steps to follow when doing activities of daily living (ADLs) such as getting out of bed, standing up from a sitting position, putting on clothes, taking a shower, and more.

Clamshell Precautions

You will need to protect your ribcage and *sternum* (breastbone) after surgery. Until your care team tells you otherwise, follow these *clamshell precautions*.

Most patients need to follow these precautions for **10 to 12 weeks**:

- Do **not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 10 pounds when using both arms, or 5 pounds when using one arm. (A gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds.)
- Do **not** rest any of your body weight on your arms.
- Do **not** push with your arms to stand up.
- Do **not** lean on your arms or use them to prop yourself up when you are lying down.
- Always be aware of the position of your elbows when you use your arms. Do **not** raise your elbow higher than your shoulders.
- Do **not** reach behind your back or twist your body.
- Do **not** bend or reach over to one side.
- When doing your activities of daily living (ADLs), follow the instructions in this handout.



After lung surgery, be very careful about how you use your arms.

Getting into Bed

- Hug a pillow or cross your arms over your chest. Sit near the top third of the bed, as far back from the edge as you can.
- In one smooth motion, lie on your side and lift your legs up onto the bed. Keep your knees bent.
- Use your legs to help you roll like a log onto your back. Do **not** twist your trunk (torso). You can push with your feet to scoot up or down in bed, but do **not** use your arms or your elbows.



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Getting Out of Bed (Log Roll Technique)

See photos above.

- Hug a pillow or cross your arms over your chest. Bend your knees and roll onto your side.
- Move your feet off the bed. Pull your feet against the edge of the bed. **Gently** use the side of your arm to raise your body to sit up.
- Sit on the side of the bed before you stand.
- If you cannot sit up by yourself without pushing up with your arms, **ask for help**.

Standing Up from a Bed, Chair, or Toilet

- Hug a pillow or cross your arms over your chest and scoot forward toward the edge of the chair.
- Lean forward with your nose over your toes. Use your legs to stand.
- Do **not** push with your arms.

If it is hard for you to stand up from sitting, your occupational therapist (OT) may suggest you use a higher bed, a pillow or foam cushion in your chair, and a raised toilet seat.

Taking off Shirts Over Your Head

See photos to the right.

- Reach to the back of your collar with both hands. Keep both elbows below shoulder height. Pull the shirt over your head.
- When you remove the sleeves, do **not** let your elbows move behind your back.





Putting on Shirts Over Your Head

See photos above.

- Lay the front of the shirt in your lap with the collar at your knees.
- With the shirt still on your lap, start from the bottom of the shirt and slide your arms into the sleeves. Push the sleeves up as close to your shoulders as possible.
- Gather up the body of the shirt with your hands. Tuck your chin toward your chest. Keep your elbows below shoulder height as you place the shirt over your head.
- Adjust the shirt from the shoulders. Reach across your belly or from the sides as needed.



Putting on Pants and Underwear

See photos above.

- Sit on a bed or chair. Reach forward and place your legs into the pants as you normally would.
- Stand and pull your pants up with your elbows **out to the side**. Do not let your elbows point backward.
- Hook your fingers into the waistband. Wiggle your hips and lean forward to pull the pants up into place.
- If it is hard for you to put on your pants and underwear, your OT may suggest you use a long-handled reacher or a dressing stick.

Putting on Socks and Shoes

- Sit on a bed or chair. Lift one leg and place your ankle onto the opposite knee. Or place your foot on a stool or the edge of the bed.
- Reach forward and slip on your sock or shoe as you normally would. Repeat with the other leg.
- To take off your socks or shoes, use the same method or **briefly** bend over from a sitting position.
- Do not hold your breath when you are leaning forward.

If it is hard for you to put on your socks and shoes, your OT may suggest you use a sock aid, reacher, and long-handled shoehorn.

Personal Hygiene

After using the toilet, clean yourself by reaching through your legs and wiping front to back. Do **not** reach behind your back.

If this is hard to do, your OT may advise you to use a toilet aid or bidet.



Bathing

See photos above.

Follow the steps below to shower.

- To wash your incision, **gently** massage unscented soap on the area with your fingers. Do **not** scrub your skin or wound.
- Wash your underarms and the side of your body by lifting your arm only to shoulder-level and reaching across your body. Wash between your legs by reaching front to back.
- Keep your elbows below shoulder height when you shampoo, rinse, and dry your hair.
- Sit to dry your body. To reach your back, flip a towel over the top of your head or put on a terrycloth robe.

If showering is hard or tiring for you, your OT may suggest you use a shower chair, a hand-held shower head, a non-skid mat, and a bendable long-handled sponge.

Hair Care

To comb, style, or shave your hair:

- Raise your arms only to shoulder level. You may want to use one arm at a time and tilt your head to the side.

Other Activities

- **For 10 weeks or until your provider says it is safe to be more active:** Do **not** do any activities that can stress your incision. This includes swimming, running, bowling, skiing, golf, tennis, horseback riding, and softball.
- Do **NOT** take a bath, go swimming, or sit in a hot tub or sauna.
- **Until your provider says it is safe for you to resume these activities:**
 - Have someone else do chores such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, and yard work.
 - Do **not** lift, push, or pull anything that weighs more than 10 pounds when using both arms, or more than 5 pounds when using one arm. This includes groceries, laundry, furniture, pets, and children.
 - Do **not** open tight jars, heavy doors, or heavy/stuck windows.
 - Do **not** drive any vehicle until your provider says it is safe.
 - On long drives, stop every hour to get out and walk briefly.

Self-Care

- Follow the clamshell precautions in this handout to make sure you heal well. Do **not** use your pain as a guide for what movements are safe and not safe to do. Let your provider decide when you are fully healed and can use your arms normally again.
- Be gentle with yourself. Do not make yourself do hard tasks right away.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Wash your incision every day by showering or sponge bathing at the sink.
- Get dressed every day.
- Eat nutritious meals.
- Go for walks and do the exercises your occupational therapist taught you.
- Slowly resume the activities you enjoy.
- It is normal to feel tired, frustrated, or even depressed after major surgery. Some people cannot think as clearly as usual. Talk with your care provider if these issues do not go away.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.