



Postural Drainage

A self-care pulmonary hygiene exercise

Postural drainage is done as a mucus-clearing exercise to reduce and prevent the buildup of excess mucus within your lungs. This exercise is done by maintaining prescribed chest positions for a period of time that allows gravity to help drain the excess mucus from your airways.

Postural drainage is a convenient drainage exercise that can be done at home and alone with a minimum of effort.

Why should I use postural drainage?

Many people with either short or long term pulmonary disease conditions experience an increase in the mucus secretions produced in their lungs. An increase in the amount or thickness of the mucus within the airways of your lungs can make it harder for you to breathe by reducing the flow of air in and out of the lungs. A build-up of mucus can also increase the potential for pneumonia or infections that can develop if the retained mucus secretions are not cleared.

Postural Drainage Instruction

Postural drainage can be done either in bed or on the floor using 3 or 4 pillows to maintain the correct positions. Each drainage position should be done for 5 to 10 minutes and followed by a series of huff and/or controlled coughs to clear your secretions before moving to the next position.

Huff Coughs

- Huff coughs are done by breathing in to about half of your maximum inhalation effort and forcefully exhaling through open vocal cords, which causes a “huff” sound.
- This can be aided by using your arms to help compress the chest while exhaling.
- Huff coughs can also follow a deep breath with a 2- to 3-second breath hold and exhalation through pursed lips to help clear secretions.
- Repeat these efforts until the secretions have been cleared before starting a new position.

CAUTION:

Postural drainage should be done either before meals or at least two hours after, to avoid gastric reflux problems. If you have any history of high blood pressure, stroke, gastric esophageal or swallowing disorder, your doctor will advise you on whether or not postural drainage is right for you.

If you experience difficulty breathing while in a drainage position, you may need to modify the position or stop the exercise. If you experience a new onset of difficult breathing while in a drainage position, consult your doctor.

Postural Drainage and Diaphragmatic Breathing

If you feel a need to cough and clear secretions while in a postural drainage position, sit up and cough to clear before resuming the position. Always use diaphragmatic breathing and pursed lip breathing to help your breathing and aid in drainage.

- Diaphragmatic breathing is done by placing a hand over the center of your stomach and inhaling through your nose while allowing the stomach muscles to relax and move your hand out.
- At the same time, your chest should remain still through the exercise.
- Exhale through pursed lips while tightening the stomach muscles and compressing the stomach with your hand to help move air out of your lungs.

Postural Drainage Schedule

- Postural drainage can be done alone or combined with different forms of chest physiotherapy, a vibration of the chest wall, to help clear the airways.
- The positions for postural drainage and the number of times per day you should exercise, as well as any additional chest physiotherapy regimen, will be prescribed by your doctor.
- A twice-per-day postural drainage schedule, done in the morning before breakfast and in the evening before sleep, is usually sufficient to maintain clearance.
- The number of exercises per day should be increased if you experience an increase in volume and/or change in color of your secretions.
- If you use bronchodilators, schedule your medications at least 15 minutes before starting the postural drainage exercises. This will allow enough time for the medication to open your airways and help clear the secretions.
- If you are using home oxygen you may need to increase the flow in a postural drainage position. This can be determined when postural drainage is prescribed for you.
- You should also drink at least six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water or other liquids (not coffee or tea) daily to help thin the mucus in your lungs and aid in the drainage process. If you have problems with fluid retention, discuss your daily fluid intake with your doctor.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC Clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

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Management of Your Condition

With a rapid onset of a pulmonary infection or a chronic problem of increased mucus secretions, you can use postural drainage to monitor the production of mucus and to maintain airway clearance. You should observe the color, thickness, and volume of mucus produced daily in order to monitor your own pulmonary condition. An increase in mucus volume and/or change in color, as well as an increase in your temperature, or soreness in the chest can indicate a developing lung infection. Tell your primary care doctor about the changes you see so that any necessary change in your therapy can be started.

The use of postural drainage exercises and self-monitoring can allow you to take more control in the management of your pulmonary condition, and may reduce the potential of serious pneumonia infections and hospital stays.

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