

Returning home from lung surgery.

Pain

Pain levels will decrease with time and are usually mild to moderate by the time you are discharged. Pain medication will be prescribed by your doctor, to be taken as instructed for pain control. You may also need to take the medicine before an activity in order to prevent pain. Prescription pain medication may make you drowsy and should not be taken while doing any activity that requires coordination, such as driving a car. Pain medication should also not be mixed with alcohol.

Activity level

Activity should be advanced gradually, as tolerated. It is recommended that you walk regularly and exercise the arm on the surgery side. Our team will provide you with some post-op exercises that you should do following your surgery. This will help prevent muscle stiffness. You should avoid strenuous activities and lifting anything over 10 pounds until your two-week follow-up appointment with your surgeon. At that time, your lifting restrictions may be modified.

Listen to your body; if you feel fatigued, take a rest or nap. Space your activities to allow for rest periods and use your pain medication as needed.

The decision to return to work should be made on an individual basis, depending on the type of work you do and how fast you heal. For most people, it takes four to six weeks to return to their full energy level. Ask your surgeon what he/she feels is right for you.

You should delay vacations away from home for two to three weeks. In case of a post-op complication you would not want to be too far from your surgeon. At your first post-op appointment, ask your surgeon if it is OK to travel away from home.

Incision

Check your incision site daily for signs of infection: redness, swelling, discharge or odor. If any of these occur, call your doctor's office. It is OK to shower when you return home, unless otherwise instructed. Wash the incision gently with warm water and mild soap only, and pat dry with a clean towel. It is not recommended to soak the incision site in a bathtub or Jacuzzi for two to three weeks after discharge. You may go home with a few sutures where the chest tubes were placed. These will be removed at your next doctor's appointment. You may have paper strips (steri-strips) over your incision. These should start to peel off as you shower daily. If they do not, you may gently peel them off after five days following discharge.

It is normal for a scab to form over the incision and, after that, a scar. The scar should fade in six to 12 months. During this time it is important to protect the scar from direct sunlight by wearing a shirt or sunblock. It is normal to experience numbness, itching or tingling in the incision area. These symptoms will fade in time.

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Diet

Eating a well- balanced diet is important after surgery. Your body needs protein for skin and tissue healing. Fruits and vegetables provide necessary vitamins and minerals also necessary for healing and strong immunity. Drink six to eight glasses of water per day for good hydration and to prevent constipation. Many people experience lack of appetite and nausea. Eating smaller, more frequent meals can help with these symptoms.

You may have constipation after surgery. This is usually caused by a combination of lack of activity, pain medication, low dietary fiber and fluid intake. Drinking plenty of water, eating fruits and vegetables and taking a stool softener (Senna-S, or Colace) can help relieve constipation.