



## Discharge information for patients after chest surgery

### Introduction

This booklet is to help you during your recovery and rehabilitation from chest surgery during the first few months after you leave hospital. It does not replace the discussion between you and your surgeon but helps you to understand more about what is discussed.

If you have any problems or questions, or are concerned about any aspect of your recovery then you can either:

- Contact Ward 513, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham via switchboard 0121 371 2000 07:00 to 20:00 hours.
- Advanced Clinical Practitioners via the Thoracic Surgery Department Secretaries 0121 371 2129 08:00 to 17:00 hours.
- See your GP
- Speak to your surgeon the next time you attend the outpatient department if you do not mind waiting until then
- Look at the website [www.thoracicsurgery.co.uk](http://www.thoracicsurgery.co.uk)
- If you feel very unwell please attend A&E urgently taking your discharge notes with you

### Symptoms to look out for:

- Fever, chills, shaking, flu like symptoms
- Suddenly very short of breath or shortness of breath that suddenly gets worse
- Severe central chest pain with a sweaty or clammy feeling
- Severe build-up of air under the skin
- Wound oozing, much more pain, and skin that is red and hot to touch

### Pain relief

- A supply of tablets will be given to you to take home. You will be told how and when to take your tablets by the nurse. This may happen on the ward or at the discharge lounge
- If you require further medication you will need to see your GP

### Do not let yourself be in pain

- You may need pain relief for a few weeks or months. When you feel that you no longer need pain relief, do not just stop your medication suddenly, cut down gradually
- You may need to take regular stool softeners (laxatives) while you are taking codeine or morphine to prevent constipation, but also try walking around and drinking lots of water
- You may feel quite well after six weeks but allow three to six months for a full recovery.

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- You may also have good days and bad days and it can feel like you are taking forward and backward steps. This is normal
- Some patients may receive a phone call from an Advanced Clinical Practitioner a few days after going home. Please do not wait for this call if you are feeling unwell

### Medications

In addition to painkillers, we routinely add anti-sickness tablets and stool softeners (laxatives) to your list of medicines. We give these to help with the nausea, sickness and constipation that some patients suffer from.

### What about smoking?

If you smoke, we strongly advise you to stop. If you have stopped before surgery please do not re-start. If members of your family smoke ask them to support you and improve their own health by stopping too. If you do not succeed at your first attempt then you should not let this put you off trying again. If you would like further advice you can speak to your GP practice nurse. You can also find your nearest NHS Stop Smoking Service from the NHS Smokefree website, or call the Smokefree National Helpline on **0300 123 1044** to speak to a trained adviser.

### What sort of wound will I have?

Most stitches used today are dissolvable, however the stitch used to tie off the drain wound will need to be removed 5–7 days after the drain was removed.

If you have had surgical clips on your wound these will need to be removed in 10–14 days.

You will need to contact your GP surgery to arrange for stitch or clip removal after discharge.

Your wound should have been checked and dressings removed before you leave hospital. You might have a dressing over the wound where your drain was. This should be removed after one or two days. You may still have some bruising and swelling and numbness, this is quite normal and may take some weeks to improve. You may have some numb areas around your wound which may be permanent. If your wound becomes red and hot to touch or oozes any type of fluid you should contact your GP as this could indicate an infection.

### Can I have baths and showers?

Please do not bath or shower if you still have a chest drain in place. Once removed you can take a bath or shower as normal, but avoid rubbing soap directly over the wound or soaking the wound for long periods, until it is completely healed. Remember not to bath or shower if you are alone in the house in case you need help.

### When can I return to work?

If you work and are planning to return, the amount of time you should take off will vary on the type of surgery you have had and the type of work you do. You should speak to your surgical team at your next appointment if you need advice.

### When can I drive?

Please contact your insurance company for advice regarding driving after surgery.

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### Should I change my diet?

If you would like specific dietary advice please ask to speak to the dietician before you leave hospital. For most people a healthy diet (low in fat, sugars and salt but high in fibre and protein) will aid your recovery.

### When will it be safe to go on holiday?

If you have planned, or are planning a holiday in the near future then you can take one as soon as you feel ready to travel, as long as this is not by plane. Holidays involving flying should not be taken for about six weeks after surgery. If you are going to be in the sun, ensure that your wound is not exposed without a high factor (factor 30 or higher) sunscreen for about six months.

### When will I be well enough to have sex?

You can continue your sex life as soon as you feel well enough. At first you may find that you are uncomfortable or short of breath, but trying different positions may help.

### Mobility and exercise

It is important that you continue with daily 'walks' and everyday activities like washing, dressing and cooking.

Building up your fitness gradually is essential, with gentle short 'walks' and stair climbing at first, progressing to longer walks out of the house. Start off slowly so you can gauge how much is right for you (aim to get slightly short of breath) and build up pace and distance weekly.

From 6–8 weeks after the drain has been removed, you can build up to exercises such as swimming, walking, cycling and light jogging.

Remember, depending on your surgery you may be breathless for several weeks after going home, but it should show gradual improvement.

After discharge from hospital continue with deep breathing exercises for the first week at home if you were given them by the physiotherapist, and use a cushion or towel to support your cough as necessary.

### Shoulder Exercises

You might experience pain and stiffness in your shoulder after surgery. This can ease with regular gentle movement.

Do these exercises 10 times each, twice per day.



Clasp your hands in front of you.  
Lift your hands and stretch your arms above your head.



Lift your arm sideways with your thumb leading the way. Also touch your hand to your shoulder, and then circle your elbow forwards and backwards.



Place the back of your hand as close as you can to the small of your back. Then reach up and touch the back of your neck with your hand.

### After care at home

You may need some community care immediately after your operation but most patients are well enough to look after themselves when they go home. However, support from your family and friends will help you to recover quicker.

### Useful information and contacts

University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.thoracicsurgery.co.uk](http://www.thoracicsurgery.co.uk)

Macmillan Cancer Support  
**0808 808 0000**  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

The Roy Castle Foundation  
**0800 358 7200**  
[www.roycastle.org](http://www.roycastle.org)

Cancer Research  
[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

Cancer Advice  
[www.canceradvice.co.uk](http://www.canceradvice.co.uk)

Mesothelioma UK  
**0800 169 2409**  
[www.mesothelioma.uk.com](http://www.mesothelioma.uk.com)

Marie Curie Cancer Care  
**0800 716 146**  
[www.mariecurie.org.uk](http://www.mariecurie.org.uk)

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NHS Free Smoking Helpline  
**0300 123 1044**

National Lung Cancer Forum for Nurses  
**[www.nlcfn.co.uk](http://www.nlcfn.co.uk)**

### Contact information

See page 1 of the leaflet

You can also ask to speak to your consultant's secretary by calling the switchboard on **0121 371 2000**.

Mr R S Steyn  
Mr M S Kalkat  
Mr E S Bishay  
Mr U B V Naidu  
Mr H Fallouh  
Ms V Rogers

### Department address and contact information:

#### Thoracic Surgery

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham  
Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston Birmingham, B15 2GW  
Telephone: 0121 371 2000

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email [patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk).