

Thoracotomy

After Visit Summary

This is general information. Please see your After Visit Summary for how to take care of yourself after surgery.

Your health care team will work with you to understand any challenges you have after your hospital stay. This will help your team work toward a plan to make sure you have the right care and support to help manage your health after you leave the hospital.

Your Surgery

A thoracotomy is done to access your heart, lungs, esophagus, aorta (artery) or spine.

What to Expect After Surgery

- During the first few weeks after surgery, you may have itching, pulling, tingling, tightness, mild pain and swelling as your incision heals. This is normal.
- It will take from 6 months to a year for your incision to heal completely. Most of the healing takes place in the first 6 to 8 weeks.

Before the Surgery

- Tell your health care provider if you:
 - are pregnant
 - have a latex allergy
 - have diabetes
 - take a blood-thinner medicine.
- Remove any jewelry or piercings.

- Arrange to have someone drive you home. You will not be able to drive after the surgery.

Pain Relief

- Take any prescription or over-the-counter medicine as directed.

Activity

- For the first few days at home, continue the activity level you were at in the hospital.
- Slowly increase your activity level. Walk short distances several times a day and increase the distance as your strength allows. You may need more rest after surgery.
- Exercise your arm on the affected side by gently motion such as brushing or combing your hair.
- Your health care provider will tell you when it's OK for you to shower, drive, return to work, exercise and have sex.
- Follow your health care provider's directions for how much you can safely lift.
- Rest as needed.
- Avoid smoking.

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Incision Site

- Steri-Strips® (paper-like tape) may have been placed on your incision. You may peel them off after 7 days.
- Follow any directions your health care provider gives you.
- Do not use lotions, creams, ointments, gels or powders on your incision site.

Food and Beverages

- Eat well-balanced meals. Follow any instructions your health care provider gave you.
- Avoid alcohol while you are taking prescription pain medicine.

Breathing Exercises

To keep your lungs free of infection, do the following:

- Take a deep breath and hold it as long as you can. Then push the air out of your lungs with a deep, strong cough. Take 10 deep breaths in a row every hour while awake. Remember to follow each deep breath with a cough. To lessen the pain, hold a pillow tightly against your abdomen (belly) when you cough.
- You may be asked to use an incentive spirometer. This helps you take deeper breaths.

When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you:

- have a temperature of 101 F or higher
- have new pain or pain you can't control
- have bleeding that gets worse
- have problems having a bowel movement
- have signs of infection at your incision site:
 - pain
 - swelling
 - redness
 - odor
 - warmth
 - green or yellow discharge
- are unable to get out of bed
- have nausea (upset stomach), bloating or vomiting (throwing up) that won't stop
- have trouble breathing
- cough up yellow, green or blood mucus
- have any questions or concerns.

Follow-up Appointment

Please keep all follow-up appointments with your health care provider or specialist, even if you are feeling well.