Thoracic Surgery Exercise Program

This booklet has been designed to help you learn exercises that will speed your recovery after surgery. There are a variety of exercises you can do to help prevent complications. You can make the difference! On the following pages you will find step-by-step instructions for breathing, coughing and upper body exercises, and some important points on posture. Your nurse or therapist will instruct you on how to perform these exercises after your surgery.

Breathing exercises
With all breathing exercises, inhale slowly through your nose. This helps to humidify the air. Then, slowly blow out as much air as you can through your mouth.

1. Place your hands on your lower rib cage and feel the expansion of the lower ribs as you inhale and the sinking in of the ribs as you exhale.

2. Place your right hand on your right lower rib cage. Concentrate on expanding only that side when you inhale. Repeat with the left side. Do the exercise in a sitting position and lying on each side.

3. Place your hands on your upper abdomen and feel the expansion around the waist as you inhale and the pulling in of the abdomen as you exhale.

Coughing exercises
Take a deep breath before coughing. This will allow air to push the congestion upward during coughing.

Two short, clear coughs should be done after each inhalation. Throat clearing, tiny coughs, and “hacking” are not effective in clearing the congestion. Rest as needed between coughs to avoid fatigue.

You will find it more comfortable to hold a pillow or a folded blanket over your incision when coughing.

When to do breathing and coughing exercises
Breathing exercises must be done every waking hour to speed recovery. Do Breathing Exercise #1 the first hour, Exercise #2 the second hour, and Exercise #3 the third hour. Do each exercise at least five times and follow the breathing exercises with double coughs.

Posture
Good posture is vital to full lung expansion. Here are some “DOs and DON’Ts.”

When in bed:
• Don’t slouch.
• Don’t slide down in bed.
• Do sit up with your shoulders back and relaxed.

When standing or walking:
• Don’t hold one shoulder lower than the other.
• Do stand up straight.

You can play an active part in your recovery!
**Upper body exercises**
Upper body exercises are important to maintain the flexibility of the muscles on the side of your incision. They will also help to prevent the loss of shoulder motion. Do the exercises slowly. Do not hold your breath while doing the exercises.

Do Arm Exercises ____________ times a day.

1) Shrug shoulders up and relax.

2) Pull shoulders back to bring the shoulder blades close together, and then forward to bring shoulder blades far apart, and relax.

3) Do shoulder circles in both direction.
4) a. Lift arms in front and above the head, keeping elbows straight, and lower.
   b. Reach back with your arms as far as possible, keeping elbows straight, and lower.

5) Lift arms in front to shoulder level, spread them apart, bring them together, and lower.

6) Lift arms out sideways to shoulder level, turn palms up and touch hands above the head, and lower. Be sure to keep elbows straight.

7) Clasp hands behind the back, slide them up and down the backbone, and return them to lap.
8) Clasp hands behind the neck. Bring elbows together and apart.

9) During this exercise, keep your back firmly against the chair back. Hold your arms forward at shoulder level with elbows straight. Reach arms forward as if to touch a wall several inches beyond the fingertips, and then pull arms back.

10) With a firm seat on the chair, hands on hips, twist upper body to the right and then the left, and relax.

11) With a firm seat on chair, bend to one side, then the other, and relax.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.