Thoracotomy Home Exercise Program

The main goal with this exercise program is to maintain mobility in the muscles of your chest. By using a cane or towel, you can help your arm on the side of the incision with your other arm. It is important to perform these exercises in your pain-free range. If your pain level is increasing, decrease the amount of motion you are performing during the exercise. These exercises can be performed in sitting or standing position.

1. Pendulum
   Bend at your waist, resting the arm not on the side of the incision, on a steady object. Let the arm on the side of the incision dangle loosely towards the ground, like a pendulum. Gently swing the arm in slow circles, both clockwise and then counterclockwise.
   Perform circles in each direction for _____ repetitions _____ times a day.

2. Side-to-Side
   Hold the cane or towel in both hands with your palms down. Place your arms straight out in front of you and move the cane/towel from side to side.
   Perform _____ repetitions _____ times a day.

3. Shoulder Reach
   Hold the cane or towel in both hands with your palms down. Keeping your elbows straight, slowly raise the cane/towel up, stretching your arms over your head.
   Perform _____ repetitions _____ times a day.

4. Behind the Head Lift
   Perform the same exercise as in #2 (Side-to-Side) by slowly raising the cane/towel over your head. With your arms extended over your head, slowly bend your elbows and lower the cane/towel behind your head.
   Perform _____ repetitions _____ times a day.
5. **Shoulder Swings**
Holding the cane or towel in both hands with your palms up, slowly raise your arms out to the side toward your shoulders. Remember to keep your elbows straight. Perform _____repetitions _____times a day.

6. **Shoulder Extension**
Holding the cane or towel in both hands behind your back, slowly lift the cane/towel away from your back. Remember to keep your elbows straight. Perform _____repetitions _____times a day.

7. **Back Pull-Up**
Holding the cane or towel in both hands behind your back, slowly pull the cane/towel up your back by bending your elbows. Remember to have the cane/towel touching your back. Perform _____repetitions _____times a day.

8. **Lower Trunk Rotation**
While lying on your back, slowly lower both knees to the right and then to the left. Remember to keep your back flat and both feet together. Perform _____repetitions _____times a day.

**Breathing Techniques**
After surgery, you may find it hurts to take a deep breath. To control your breathing pattern, remember the following:

- Keep your shoulders relaxed
- Sit up tall, but do not have a stiff posture
- Take a deep breath in through your nose, hold it for a count of 1-2, and slowly exhale through your mouth
- It should take you twice as long to blow out the breath than it did to breathe it in through your nose

*Continued*
Coughing Technique
After surgery, it might be difficult to cough. To help decrease the pain, you might find it more comfortable to “hug” a pillow in front of you while coughing.

Energy Conservation Techniques
After surgery, you may find that you do not have as much energy and it takes longer to perform your daily activities. The following tips can help you simplify tasks:

- **Plan rest breaks**
  - Sit down and rest after heavy work tasks
  - Rest before you get tired – it will take you less time to recover

- **Sit when possible**
  - Use a chair when washing dishes or folding laundry
  - Sit down when brushing your teeth/putting on make-up

- **Ask for help**
  - Avoid lifting heavy objects – ask someone to perform those tasks for you
  - Ask a neighbor to help with yard work

Pain Control
You may experience some post-surgical pain after you return home. In order to keep the pain from affecting your daily life, you can use the following tips to control your level of discomfort:

- **Get daily exercise.** The activity will help strengthen your muscles, allowing you to do more.
- **Allow yourself rest breaks** and relax your muscles.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** Try not to let your discomfort prevent you from enjoying friends and family.
- **Participate in social activities.** Hobbies can help to focus your attention away from your pain.
- **Pay attention to your posture and body mechanics** throughout the day. Make sure you are using proper positioning when standing, sitting and bending.
- **Set goals for yourself.** Think about the tasks that are difficult to perform and identify specific ways to work towards completing those activities on your own.
- **Get support from others,** but remember to do as much on your own as possible.
- **Take each day one at a time.** Do not focus too much of your attention on what you cannot yet do, but keep in mind those things you are able to do independently.