

Going Home After Thoracic or Lung Surgery

Information to support you and your family during your recovery

Recovery Advice Line
Tel: 0151 600 1056
24 hours / 7days per week

Cedar Ward
Tel: 0151 600 1166/1167

Excellent, compassionate and safe care for **every patient**, every day

Personal Information and Contact Information

This booklet has been produced to help you understand what to expect on discharge at Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital following lung (thoracic) surgery. This also contains information for your family or friends who may be helping to care for you following discharge from our Hospital.

This booklet is also to help you keep a record of your care following your surgery. This booklet is confidential. It may only be read or written in, with your permission.

Name	
Address/details of other discharge address if not going home	
Telephone Number	
Your Hospital Number	
NHS Number	
Procedure	
Date of Procedure	
Consultant	
District Nurse Visit and Contact Telephone number	
Date to remove your Support Stockings	
Follow up clinic date	
Medical Social worker Contact Number (if appropriate)	

When you are discharged from the hospital you will also be given a copy of:

- Pain advice sheet
- Wound care advice sheet
- Graduated Compression Stockings information sheet
- Healthier Lifestyle Choices Booklet

Before you leave the ward a member of the nursing staff will discuss your discharge arrangements and answer any questions you may have.

Medication

Prior to your discharge from hospital, you will receive a two week supply of the tablets which you will need to continue to take at home. The nurse will explain the reason for medication and the side effects to look out for and when you should take it. If you have any questions relating to your medication, then a pharmacist is available for advice. If you are unsure about when to take your medication please ask for written instructions or if you require a dosset box (box to indicate which tablets you take each day), then we will provide this for you.

Repeat prescriptions

Prior to your discharge you will be given a copy of the letter that is sent to your GP (own doctor). This contains a list of the medication that your GP should continue to prescribe for you, and will also contain information about your hospital stay. This letter is sent in the post or faxed to your GP's surgery within a couple of days following your discharge home and will provide them with up to date information about your medication and your condition. A detailed letter will also be sent to your GP by your surgeon shortly following your discharge.

We would advise you to contact your GP's surgery within the first couple of days of being home as it may be necessary for you to make an appointment to see your GP to discuss your progress and arrange a further prescription.

Pain relief

Good pain control is essential for a speedy recovery and to help you to return to normal activities. When you leave hospital you will have been given tablets for pain relief. You should take these as instructed. Taking them regularly after your operation is the key to successful pain control. If you still have pain after taking the tablets you should contact your GP to have your pain relieving medication reviewed.

When you are feeling more comfortable and can exercise without discomfort you may gradually reduce the tablets you are taking for pain relief by leaving out a dose or taking one tablet instead of two. You may experience a few aches and pains in your chest and shoulders for a few months after your surgery. If there is any change in the type and location of the pain, please contact your GP.

Please also refer to the Pain Advice Sheet for when you should be able to perform certain activities.

Constipation

Constipation can occur following any type of surgery. This is due to the anaesthetic and also the pain control you will need to take. If necessary you will be given laxative to take home with you. To help prevent constipation try to eat a well balanced diet, for example eat additional fruit and fibre and drink plenty of fluid. Once you are home and if you normally move your bowels on a daily basis and are now constipated, seek advice from your GP.

Wounds

Most patients having 'thoracic' or chest surgery (this includes lung) will have a wound at the front, side and/or back of the chest. Do not be afraid to get your wounds wet. Keeping them clean will encourage healing.

You should ensure that all soap has been thoroughly rinsed off and then pat dry with a clean towel. Do not use a flannel or sponge when cleaning wounds as these may harbour infection.

The nurses will check your wound regularly until you leave hospital. It is important to report if there is any redness, pain or leakage from the wound, so that this can be treated appropriately.

You may have stitches in your wound or chest drain site that will need removal 7-10 days after your operation. If you are discharged before they have been removed, the ward nurse will arrange for a district nurse to remove them at home. If the district nurse does not arrive by 5 pm then contact your GP and ask for the contact number for the District Nurse Service. Alternatively it may be more convenient for you to visit a walk in centre or to visit your practice nurse at your medical centre.

In general your wound will be healing without problems when you go home, although occasionally you can expect a slight ooze from the wound which requires a simple dressing.

If your wound becomes quite red or suddenly becomes more painful or starts leaking a discoloured fluid you should consult your GP or district nurse immediately. They can contact the hospital for advice as required.

Please also refer to the Discharge Advice for Wound Care leaflet.

Bathing

Showering or bathing will keep your wounds clean and encourage them to heal. Do not add anything to your bath, use water only. Do not get in or out of the bath on your own for the first 2-3 weeks following surgery. Apart from danger of slipping, you will put too much pressure on your arms and through to your wounds.

This will not help with the healing process and may cause damage. If possible use a shower rather than a bath for the first five weeks, but if you do take a bath, remember to:

- Empty the water out of the bath before you get out.
- Place a non-slip mat or a towel in the bath before attempting to stand up.
- Get assistance to get out of the bath.

Support Stockings

Support stockings are otherwise known as Graduated compression or anti-embolic stockings.

Patients who are likely to be less mobile following discharge or those who may have an increased risk of developing a blood clot in their legs otherwise known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE) will be required to wear support

stockings following discharge from hospital for six weeks. These patients will be given two pairs of stockings and an information leaflet to take home.

Breathlessness

Breathlessness on exertion (movement) can be normal following lung surgery. The physiotherapist may have shown you the positions that are described below, as they may ease it. This practice should be followed after discharge. In addition if you concentrate on breathing out slowly, this can help to control your breathing.

Try leaning forward whilst sitting in a chair with your forearms resting on your thighs. Try to keep upper chest and shoulders relaxed, therefore keeping the lower part of your chest free to expand.

Rest, Sleep and Relaxation

During the first few weeks at home, you will find you tire easily, so adequate rest is as important as exercising for your recovery. Have a rest in the afternoon for an hour and make sure that your friends and relatives are aware of when your rest periods are, to reduce disturbances. If you tire during a particular activity such as climbing the stairs, sit down and rest.

Try and have a good 8-10 hours sleep each night. This may be difficult at first because your normal sleeping pattern will have been disturbed. It may take you a week or two to settle back into your normal sleeping routine. In addition, you may find that your normal sleeping position is not comfortable in the early days after your operation, due to wound soreness. It is important to continue taking your pain control regularly at night to help you sleep.

Sexual Relations

Many patients who have undergone thoracic surgery experience anxiety about resuming sexual relationships. It is quite safe to have sex and/or sexual stimulation after the operation whenever you feel ready for it. However, we generally advise you to wait between 2 -4 weeks to allow your body and wounds time to recover.

Do not expect too much of each other initially. It is unlikely that you will do any damage to the surgery, but sensible measures should be taken to avoid extensive strain on the chest wound. Choose a position, which is comfortable and does not restrict breathing and stress to your chest. Do not take your weight or your partner's weight on your arms. Do not attempt to be too energetic at first.

Dietary Advice

The food you eat plays an important part in the healing process. It is not unusual for your appetite to be poor in the early weeks following surgery. After a period of three months you should be resuming your normal eating pattern: it is at this time you should consider 'Healthy Eating'. However if weight loss continues to be an issue for you, please consult your GP. Please refer to the Healthier Lifestyle Choices Booklet for further advice.

Alcohol

Alcohol may be taken in moderation after discharge from hospital, but you should ask your nurse or pharmacist for information about alcohol consumption with your particular medication.

If you need or want to reduce your alcohol intake please discuss this with your nurse prior to discharge or with your GP following discharge.

Smoking

To help make sure that smoking remains a past activity you may find the following points helpful:

- Keep a list of reasons for stopping smoking and refer to it regularly.
- Contact the smoking cessation advisor who is based at The Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital. You can contact them directly on 0151 600 1455. They can offer help to help you stop smoking or for you to continue not to smoke.
- Find other ways to relax, e.g. talking with friends, listening to music, or take up a new hobby.

Driving

Do not drive following discharge from hospital until you have been reviewed at your outpatient appointment and advised by your surgeon that it is safe. As a result of the wound and the healing process, muscular strength and general agility is reduced and sudden movements can bring on pain. It is therefore, essential that you do not drive a motor vehicle until the healing process is sufficiently advanced.

When driving a car or as a passenger, you are not exempt from wearing a seat belt. You may find it more comfortable if you place a towel between the seatbelt and your chest.

You must also inform your insurance company following your operation. Other rules apply for holders of HGV and PSV licence. Contact the DVLA helpline for further information on relicensing rules following surgery 0300 790 6806.

Advice to your family/friends/carers

On returning home your relative/friend needs encouragement to get back to normal. It is perfectly alright for them to be left alone during the day, while you are shopping, for example. Please try not to be over-protective as this may not be beneficial and give your relative/friend time to recover emotionally from the operation. Your support will be invaluable if your relative/friend is trying to lose weight or give up smoking, so please support this.

Emotional adjustment

Immediately after your operation you may have days when you feel low, anxious or irritable. This is normal after surgery and may continue at home but will resolve.

Holidays and flying

Now the operation is over, you may wish to plan a holiday. A restful holiday in this country may be undertaken at any time, providing you are able to cope with the travelling. Holidays abroad should be deferred for at least 8 weeks after the operation and after discussion with your Consultant Surgeon at your outpatient appointment.

Avoid strenuous holidays and extensive travelling at first. Cover the scars with complete sunblock when sunbathing in the first 6 months to avoid sunburn. It is most important to provide all details of your surgery to your holiday insurance company to ensure you have adequate health insurance cover.

Returning to work

It is wise to allow yourself time to make a complete physical and emotional recovery before returning to work. At your outpatient appointment with your Consultant Surgeon you can discuss the timing of your return to work, which will depend on the type of work that you do. If your job is not too physically or mentally demanding, you may be able to return to work 2 months after the operation.

Follow-up appointments

You will be seen by your Consultant Surgeon or a member of his/her team approximately 2-6 weeks following discharge. This appointment will be given to you before you are discharged from hospital or sent to you in the post. If you are unable to attend this appointment you should call the number on the letter or appointment card to make alternative arrangements.

Resuming daily activities and advice regarding exercise after lung surgery

After your surgery and during your stay on the ward you will have been encouraged to slowly increase your mobility. This should continue when you are discharged home.

Perhaps start pottering around the house and start short walks. At first you may feel a little breathless so build this up slowly and remember that wherever you walk to, you have to get back. Take your time. As the weeks pass you will feel stronger and be able to walk further.

When can I?

When can I?	Activities around the house	Other activities outside of the home	Activities to avoid
1st week	Walk around the home Rest periods Breathing exercises Arm exercises Shower		Heavy lifting Hoovering Bathing Sexual activity
2nd week	Light tasks – dusting Washing up cooking light meals Arm exercises Shower	Walking	Heavy lifting Pulling or pushing Hoovering Bathing Sexual activity
4 – 6 weeks	Ironing Arm exercises Remove Support Stockings at 6 weeks	Light Shopping Gardening Cleaning the car	Holiday abroad/flying
After 8 weeks	Hoovering Small jobs	Raking leaves Driving the car	
After 12 weeks		Cycling Fishing Walking Swimming Golf	

Resuming activity at home

Most people find that it takes up to 3 months after the operation for them to make a full recovery. Obviously there is considerable variation for each individual depending on how fit you were before your operation and the type of operation performed.

Generally people who have had part, or all of their lung removed take longer to recover than people having other types of lung surgery. Age is also relevant, older people may require a longer period of convalescence than younger people.

Exercise is an important factor in your recovery following surgery.

You may experience some breathlessness whilst you are carrying out activities, which is acceptable as long as it is not distressing for you. A good way to know if you are overdoing things is to be able to talk at the same time as exercising.

Always ensure that you rest between periods of exercise. If you notice yourself becoming easily tired, you are probably overdoing things, in which case reduce the distance you are walking or the activities you are doing. The amount and type of exercise which patients are able to do in the early weeks is extremely variable. The best guidelines are to do what you can without becoming too tired or short of breath.

Remember it is very important that you get as much rest as you need and always try and get a good night's sleep.

A guide for the first few weeks at home

The following advice is for guidance only

First week – walk around at home as you did in hospital. You should continue with the breathing exercises that the physiotherapist taught you. Do make sure you get plenty of rest and do not have too many visitors as you will tire easily.

Second week onwards - You should gradually introduce light tasks into your daily routine, for example dusting, washing up and cooking light meals. Do not do anything more strenuous at this stage; particularly avoid heavy lifting, pulling or pushing as this will place a strain and avoid twisting movements of your chest. Do not lift children or walk your dog as this could also place a strain on your chest.

Four to six weeks – You can gradually introduce more demanding tasks such as ironing, light shopping, light gardening, cleaning the car or walking the dog.

After eight weeks – Your wound should be healing well and therefore other tasks such as hoovering, raking leaves, driving the car and small jobs within the home may be undertaken.

After twelve weeks – You may wish to resume or take up other activities including cycling, fishing, walking and swimming. At first, it is better to use a heated swimming pool and the stroke that feels most comfortable to you. If you play golf, you may start practising your swing and hitting a few balls at this time. If you wish to play

Who do I contact if I have any problems after I go home?

If you require more details please contact either:

Dot Homan - Advanced Thoracic Nurse Practitioner

Direct Line: 0151 600 1018 or contact switchboard 0151 600 1616 ask to bleep 2114

Or you can contact your Consultant's Secretary via switchboard on 0151 600 1616

Mandie Walthew - Advanced Thoracic Nurse Practitioner

Direct Line - 0151 600 1548 or contact switchboard 0151 600 1616 ask to bleep 2636

Or you can contact your Consultant's Secretary via switchboard on 0151 600 1616

Outside normal office hours or at weekends please contact Switchboard on 0151 600 1616 and ask for Cedar Ward or the ward you were discharged from. Alternatively you could ask to speak to the Hospital Co-ordinators who are a team of senior nurses who manage the Recovery Advice Line calls.

Recovery Advice Line

The hospital has a Recovery Advice Line for patients, relatives and carers for information and advice following discharge and during your recovery. A member of the hospital nursing team will either take your call, or call you back if you leave a message with your name and telephone number. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Recovery Advice Line – Telephone: 0151 600 1056.

IMPORTANT

If you are in need of immediate help – for example are having chest pain, breathlessness, palpitations, dizziness, please do not hesitate to contact your GP for assessment or go to an A&E department or ring 999.

For Further information visit:

Website

www.roycastle.org

www.cancerguide.org

www.macmillan.org.uk

www.healthtalkonline.org

NHS Direct — <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>

NHS Stop Smoking Service – telephone: 0800 0224332 – <http://smokefree.nhs.uk/>

NHS Choice <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/workplacehealth/pages/workplacehome.aspx>

Department for Work and Pensions – <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/health-work-and-well-being/>

DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) –
<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/DriverLicensing/MedicalRulesForDrivers/index.htm>

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you well in your recovery following your thoracic surgery at the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital.

This information is available in **Large Print** and if you would like a copy please inform the nursing staff.

If you would like a copy of this in any other language or format please ask the nursing staff who will arrange this for you.