Going home with a chest drain after thoracic surgery

Information for patients
Going home with a chest drain

You are being discharged from hospital with a chest drain in place and an ‘ambulatory chest drain bag’.

The chest drain removes any air or fluid that remains in the pleural space of your lungs after your procedure. (The pleural space is usually a very small gap between the lung and the inside of the ribcage.) The bag is used to collect the fluid – you can carry it around with you.

This information leaflet tells you how to manage with a chest drain at home.
How do I look after my chest drain?

We will explain how the portable drain system works before you go home. Please ask questions if you are uncertain about anything.

The portable drain system comes with a strap, so you can wear it over your shoulder or as a belt. You will need to empty the bag if it becomes full.

Please write down how much fluid is in the bag – we will want to know this when you come for your outpatient appointment. The bag is marked to help you. There is a table at the end of this leaflet for you to record the amount of fluid you have emptied from the bag.

Do not bend or obstruct the chest drain tubing or the bag.

**To empty the bag:**

1. Wash your hands
2. Open the blue tap by turning it so that is horizontal
3. Empty the bag directly into the sink
4. Close the tap at the end of the bag, the blue tap will now be vertical
5. Clean the end with a alcohol tissue

It is important to keep the bag upright at all other times, so that the fluid does not leak out onto your clothes. At night hang the bag by its strap from your bedside table or the back of a chair so that it stays upright.
Looking after your wound

The drain is attached to your skin with a simple stitch and covered by a dry dressing. A district nurse will visit you at home to change the dressing twice a week.

Your district nurse may not have a lot of experience of looking after patients with a chest drain. Your district nurse can call us on the number at the end of the booklet if he/she has any concerns or questions.

After leaving hospital

You can slowly return to your normal activities, doing more each day. At home you will find it easier to exercise. Make sure you go for shorts walks – e.g. in the garden or to the local shop.

Do not drive a car while you have the chest drain in place as the painkillers we have given you can affect your concentration.

We hope your appetite will improve as it is important to build up your strength and energy levels by eating well. If your appetite does not improve, please speak to your GP for advice about supplements. Drink plenty of fluids such as water and fruit juice to help prevent constipation.

Will I be in pain?

A chest drain may be sore or uncomfortable. We will give you some painkillers to take home with you and we will tell you how to take them. You are likely to need painkillers while the chest drain is in place.
Will I need to do any specific exercises?

Walking is the best exercise. Set yourself short targets which you can gradually improve on. Walking up and down stairs at home is also good for you but be careful not to tire yourself out.

Practice deep breathing exercises four times a day or more if you can manage it:

• Breath in slowly and then count to ten (this expands your lungs)
• Release the breath slowly as you count to ten.
• Do this five times in a row.

What should I do if I have a problem at home?

Contact the Cardiothoracic Ward if you have any of the following:

• Difficulty in breathing
• If your drain becomes detached
• The pain at your chest drain site feels different or is getting worse
• You feel hot and or sweaty
• You have a high temperature

If you require urgent assistance please dial 999 and ask for an ambulance.
How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact one of the numbers below.

**Pre-admission and discharge liaison nurses**
(Monday to Friday 7.30 to 15.30)
01865 220274

**Practice development nurse**
(Monday to Friday 8.00 to 16.00)
01865 228912

**Cardiothoracic ward**
(Anytime)
01865 72661
### Drainage record chart:

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If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk

Calum Buchanan
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