Information for patients undergoing thoracic surgery
Please take a moment to read this information sheet before to your operation.

Physiotherapy plays an essential role in your recovery following your operation.
The physiotherapist helps by:

1. Teaching exercises to expand the lungs and clear secretions
2. Encouraging early mobility and exercise as soon as possible after surgery
3. Giving advice for when you return home

Chest problems may occur after lung surgery for the following reasons:

- **There is a tendency to take shallow breaths** after the operation and you might find you avoid the occasional deep breath, sigh or cough you might normally do due to discomfort or the fear that you may disrupt or cause damage (this will not happen!).

- **Secretions increase** after the operation and tend to be thicker and more difficult to cough up.

- **The lung is collapsed** during the operation and needs to continue re-inflating after the operation. The best way to do this is to walk around the ward. Getting up and moving around the ward soon after the operation can help you to recover more quickly. This can shorten the amount of time you may need your extra oxygen supply and can also lead towards you being able to leave hospital earlier. It will also aid secretion clearance by encouraging your body’s own natural mechanisms to work properly again.

- **You may feel tired** after your operation and less inclined to get up and move around. This is a normal response. However, it is important to exercise as well as have rest periods to reduce the risk of complications such as blood clots and chest infections.
Exercises

In order to speed your recovery and reduce the chances of complications after your operation, it is essential that you practise the following exercises. It is also important that any secretions are coughed up. In order to do the exercises you will need to feel comfortable – don’t be brave – be sensible – please take painkillers as necessary before you start.

Breathing exercises

Following your surgery, it is important to take deep breaths in order to re-expand your lung and help prevent a build-up of any secretions. The physiotherapist will go through these with you.

1. **Huffing**
   Huffing helps to move the secretions higher into the airways, which makes it easier to cough them up. The physiotherapist will show you the technique to do this.

2. **Supported coughing**
   Effective coughing is extremely important to clear secretions from your chest. To make you more comfortable you can use your hands or a folded towel to support your wound or drain site. Remember - coughing will not do any damage! Take a deep breath in and then cough hard to bring the secretions into your mouth. Taking your painkillers before coughing will help you to cough more effectively. Doing your deep breathing exercises and huffing before trying to cough is more likely to make the cough effective. This should reduce the amount of coughing you’ll need to do.
Mobility

Early mobilisation (moving around out of bed) is a very important part of your recovery and should begin on the first post-operative day. Walking is essential to re-inflate your lungs and prevent complications. The staff will help you with all the ‘clutter’ of drains and tubes relating to your operation – you will soon realise that you can mobilise safely without the staff after your first attempts. By walking around the ward you will have the chance to meet other patients who have had similar operations to you.

WHEN YOUR ARE ABLE TO WALK ON YOUR OWN, TRY TO TAKE A WALK EVERY HOUR.

We have posters on the wall of the ward to encourage and interest you whilst you are walking around.

We also have posters to indicate distance, so that you know how far you have walked each time you leave your room.
Exercise class

We also run an exercise class in the day room every morning. This enables patients to come and do some exercise in a safe environment and meet other people who have had similar operations. One of the physiotherapists will come and collect you and take you to the class if you wish to join in.

Shoulder exercises

Following your surgery, pain from your wound may prevent you from moving your shoulder as you normally would. If you don’t move your arm in the post-operative period it may lead to reduced movement in the shoulder.

The physiotherapist will go through some exercises to help prevent your shoulder from becoming stiff.

At home

Please continue your exercises at home until you feel fully recovered.

Gradually increase the distance you walk each day. Start by taking fairly gentle walks on level ground and then progress to longer distance and walking up slopes. Don’t avoid the stairs – they will increase your strength and stamina.
Please speak to a member of the physiotherapy team if you have any questions.

**Physiotherapy Team**
Tel: (01865) 751 166 and ask for Bleep 1944
(Monday-Friday 8.30am-4.30pm)
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@ouh.nhs.uk