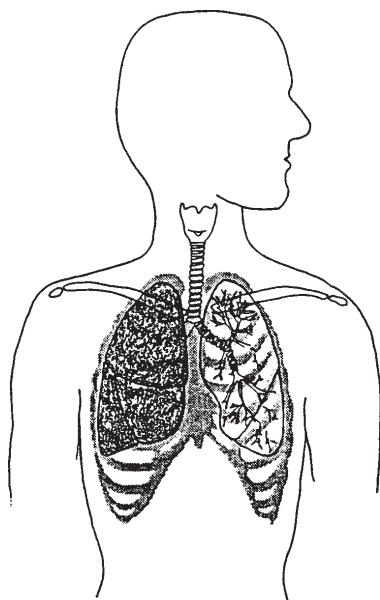


# Going Home After Your **Chest Surgery**



# Introduction

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By now your doctor has talked to you about going home. This booklet has been developed to provide you with some information about recovering from your operation once you are at home. This information is based on what our former patients and their family members have asked us about, and will help you to recover faster.

## Important Points to Consider

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### Activity

When you get home you may feel more tired than you expect. Do not let this get you down. This is normal and will improve over the next few weeks. You may need some help with groceries, housework, cooking and yard work.

Your body will set limits for your activity. Adjust your activity depending on how you feel. Avoid fatigue! Experience has shown that you feel better, heal faster and gain confidence more quickly if you **gradually** increase your activity.

- Plan your day to allow yourself time for activity and rest.
- Slowly increase your walking distance on a daily basis. We recommend that you take a walk or climb a flight of stairs at least twice a day.
- If you experience sweating, shortness of breath or fatigue during any activity, you may be doing too much. Stop, rest and start the activity later at a slower pace.

- Sometimes during surgery you are in the same position for a long time. This can cause shoulder pain and stiffness. To prevent this, follow the exercises in the back of this booklet and take your pain medicine regularly as prescribed.
- Try to get 8 hours or more of sleep each night. An afternoon nap may be helpful during your first few days at home.
- Avoid lifting, pushing or pulling objects heavier than 10 pounds (5 kilograms) for 6 to 8 weeks.
- You may start driving again in 3 weeks if you feel safe to do so. If you are still taking pain medicines known as opiates or narcotics (for example oxycodone, hydromorphone or tylenol number three) you must not drive. These medicines can make you drowsy.
- You may return to work when your surgeon suggests.
- If you have any activity you are wondering about, (for example, golfing, swimming, diving, fishing or exercising at a gym) talk to your surgeon.
- If you are planning to travel by air, check with your surgeon first.

## Nutrition

When you first return home you may not have much of an appetite. This is normal. Your appetite will improve slowly. Eat a balanced diet to help your body heal faster.

Choose foods from the four food groups (i.e. meat & alternatives, breads & cereals, fruits & vegetables, and milk & milk products). If you are on a special diet, your dietitian will have talked to you about this before you leave the hospital.

## Constipation

Constipation can result from the use of pain medications. The following are recommended to help you prevent or treat constipation:

- Eat foods that are high in fiber or roughage. Fresh fruits, vegetables, prunes and bran are good choices. Include foods which have helped you move your bowels in the past.
- Drink 8 to 10 glasses of liquid a day.
- Be as physically active as possible.
- You may need a laxative. Ask your doctor or nurse to recommend one.

## Smoking

Quitting smoking and avoiding smoke filled rooms will help you recover faster. There are lots of health benefits gained from quitting smoking. If you need help to quit smoking, please ask your doctor or nurse for information on becoming a non-smoker. You can also call HealthLink BC at 811 for support.

## Incision Care

- Your incision will usually have dissolvable stitches with steri-strips along the incision line. These steri-strips will gradually fall off.
- Sometimes staples are used to close your incision. The staples stay in for at least 8 to 10 days after surgery. They are often removed after you have gone home. Your nurse will give you a staple remover to take home with you. This is for your family doctor to remove the staples.
- You will also have one or two sutures where the chest drains have been removed. These also need to be taken out about a week after you go home. This can also be done by your family doctor.
- You may have a shower. Do not let the water from the shower flow directly over your incision because the healing tissue may be very sensitive. Do not soak your incision for 2 weeks after you return home. This means no soaking in the bath tub, hot tub or swimming pool. It is best to gently wash your incision with mild soap and water and gently pat dry. Avoid antibacterial soaps. They can irritate your skin.
- As your incision heals, it may become itchy. Do not rub or scratch your incision. Do not use Aloe and Vitamin E oils for 2 weeks or until the incision is well healed.
- Protect your incision from the sun. This will prevent your scar from permanently turning brown.
- Women may find it more comfortable to wear a loose fitting bra, elasticized camisole or tank top to provide some support

## Pain Medicine

**Pain relief works best when medicine is taken regularly. Take your medicine as ordered by your doctor.**

Good pain relief will help you to return to normal activities faster. Regular activity helps to prevent chest infections and muscle stiffness around the chest and shoulder.

Always take pain medicines with water or another liquid so they will dissolve and begin to work quickly. Over time your pain will lessen and you will need less of your pain medicine.

You may have some discomfort for up to a year. This can be helped by keeping active.

If your pain medicine is not working tell your surgeon or family doctor so you can be given something else.

Some pain medicines, especially opiates, cause drowsiness, dizziness and nausea. You must not drive a car or operate dangerous machinery while taking these medicines.

Avoid alcohol while you are taking pain medicine.

Continue taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) for 3–4 days after returning home. If you were given a prescription for stronger pain pills, you can take them if acetaminophen is not controlling your pain.

## Other Medicines

Sometimes your doctor will want you to take other medicine. Ask your doctor or nurse for information about these medicines if you are not familiar with them. Some things you should know about your medicines include:

- The name of each medicine.
- What the medicine does to help you.
- The dose you need and when you should take it.
- What to do if you miss a dose.
- When to stop taking the medicine.
- Any side effects you may have while taking the medicine.

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Please check with your doctor before taking any medicine that has not been prescribed for you. This includes over-the-counter medicines.

Please check with your surgeon before restarting your blood thinners:

- Warfarin (Coumadin)
- Clopidogrel (Plavix)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa)
- Rivarixaban (Xarelto)

Staying Healthy

It is important that you look after your lungs (or lung if you have had a pneumonectomy). Balance exercise with rest. Be very aware of what your body is telling you. Try to avoid people with colds or flu symptoms. See your family doctor as soon as possible if you develop cold or flu symptoms or if you notice an increased cough with sputum.

It is a good idea to get a flu shot and the pneumonia vaccine every year.

Call your Surgeon if any of these happen:

- You cannot drink fluids or keep them down.
- Your pain is no longer relieved with your medicine.
- You have a fever greater than 38°C.
- You have difficulty breathing.
- You have pain or swelling of the legs.
- Your incision becomes sore, swollen, red or you see drainage coming from the incision.

Follow up

You will receive a copy of your discharge plan from the Care Management Leader (CML). It has instructions for follow up appointments and supports that have been arranged for you if needed. Make sure you do not leave the hospital without your discharge plan.

Research and Clinical Trials

Vancouver Coastal Health works with the BC Cancer Agency to do research and clinical trials. If you are interested in being a part of these trials ask your doctor for more information.

Your Experience

We are always working to improve our service. If you have any concerns or wish to show your appreciation please contact the Patient Services Manager.

Questions to ask Hospital Staff

After reading this pamphlet, you may have some questions. Please write them down here so you do not forget to ask them.

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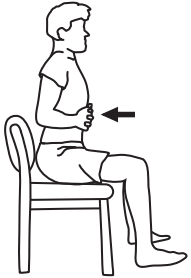
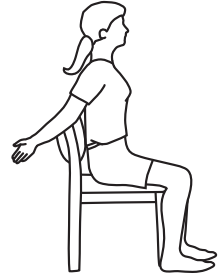
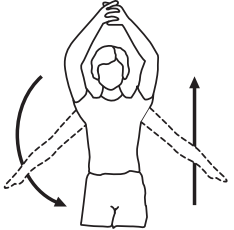

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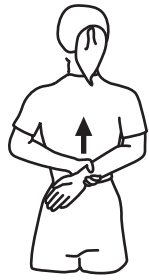

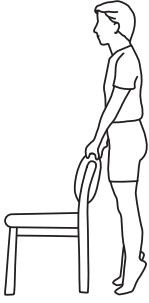
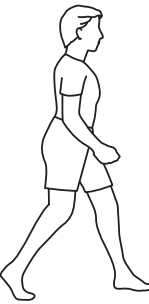
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## Personal Exercise Program

Following surgery, exercise is an important tool to regain your strength and improve your breathing. Please complete these exercises 3 times per day as prescribed by your physiotherapist. The physiotherapist will progress your exercises as appropriate.

	<p>Diaphragmatic breathing in sitting. Relax your neck and shoulders. Correct your low back posture. Place your hand on your abdomen. You should feel your hand rise as you breathe in and breathe out. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Sit with your back straight and feet firmly on the floor. Pull your shoulder blades together while turning your thumbs and hands outwards. Hold position for 5 seconds. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Sit with hands clasped in front of you. Lift both arms forward over your head. Separate your arms sideways and take them back down to the starting position. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Lying on your back with hands behind your neck and elbows pointing towards the ceiling. Move elbows apart and down to touch the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat ____ times.</p>

	<p>Stand with arms behind your back. Grasp the wrist of the arm you want to exercise. Slide your hands up your back. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Sit with your arms crossed or on your thighs. Stand up and sit down slowly on the chair. Do not lean against the chair. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Stand and hold onto the back of a chair. Raise up on your toes and hold for 5 seconds. Lower back down. Repeat ____ times.</p>
	<p>Walk for ____ (distance) ____ times per day.</p>

## Resources

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### **CIBC Centre for Patients and Families**

This centre can help you find more information on your condition as well as local services and support available. It is located on the main floor of the Jim Pattison Pavilion behind the information desk.  
[www.vch.ca/centreforpatients](http://www.vch.ca/centreforpatients)

### **The Lung Association**

BC Lung Association  
2675 Oak Street  
Vancouver, BC V6H 2K2  
Tel: 604-731-LUNG (5864) Toll free: 1-800-665-LUNG (5864)  
[www.bc.lung.ca](http://www.bc.lung.ca)

### **The Lung Centre**

Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Care Centre  
7th Floor, 2775 Laurel Street Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9  
[www.vch.ca/lung](http://www.vch.ca/lung)

### **HealthLink BC**

Speak with a nurse, pharmacist or dietitian Services available in 130 languages  
[www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) or call 811  
For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY) call 711

### **Thoracic Surgery at Vancouver Coastal Health**

[www.thoracicsurgery.bc.ca](http://www.thoracicsurgery.bc.ca)

### **Patient Services Manager**

T12 Jim Pattison Pavilion  
899 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9  
604-875-4094

### **Care Management Leader for the Chest Centre**

T12 Jim Pattison Pavilion  
899 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9  
604-875-4111 ext. 54214

### **Adult Nurse Practitioner, Thoracic and Lung Transplant Surgery Program**

T12 Jim Pattison Pavilion  
899 West 12th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9  
604-875-4111 ext. 61719

### **QuitNow.ca**

For more information on Vancouver Coastal Health's Tobacco Reduction Strategy, visit  
[www.vch.ca/your\\_health/health.topics/smoking\\_cessation](http://www.vch.ca/your_health/health.topics/smoking_cessation)  
or email [smokefree@vch.ca](mailto:smokefree@vch.ca)

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or email [pchem@vch.ca](mailto:pchem@vch.ca) and quote Catalogue No. **FN.230.T39**  
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The information in this document is intended solely for the person to whom it was given by the health care team.  
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