

Thoracic Surgery: Activity Before and After

How to speed up your recovery.

This booklet suggests activities and exercises with the aim to increase fitness levels before and after your operation. Please only complete what you feel you can.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Improving your activity and fitness levels at home and in the community

Please find the British Lung Foundation booklet provided with this pack. It offers details on how to increase activity within your day to day routine as well as detailing community settings and support accessible to all.

The aim is to improve overall activity levels within your own capabilities to get you in the best possible shape for surgery and the post-operative recovery period.

The British Lung Foundation also has a dedicated website and helpline to help support improving activity levels. www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/what-activities-can-i-do

Telephone: 03000 030 555

Things to expect immediately after your thoracic procedure

Getting moving: It is vital for everyone who has had lung surgery, no matter how small or large the operation, to sit out of bed and start moving around as soon as possible.

Increasing activity: You will be expected to do stepping or marching on the spot, take regular walks throughout the day or be shown how to use the exercise bicycle on the ward. Physical activity will speed your recovery, help prevent complications and allow you to go home sooner.

Breathing exercises: Following a thoracotomy incision and some operations by VATS (keyhole surgery) there is a risk of respiratory complications. To help minimize the risk and to get your lungs working normally again, you will be expected to take five deep breaths every half hour.

Supported cough: After an anaesthetic, secretions may collect in your lungs. It is important that you are able to cough these clear to help prevent respiratory complications. The chest wound may be uncomfortable but any pain should be controlled to allow you to cough effectively and breathe deeply. Supporting the wound will make coughing more comfortable (See diagram); coughing will not damage your chest wound. If you are unable to deep breathe and cough, speak to medical and/or nursing staff.



What exercises can I do?

Arm movements and posture: As soon as possible after your surgery, it is important to start to move your shoulder and upper body normally. This will help to prevent joint and muscle stiffness immediately after your operation and problems with posture later. The following exercises might be helpful:

1. While sitting or standing: Lift your arm up in front of you as far as you can, until you feel a gentle stretch, hold for a few seconds and then release. Repeat to the side. Repeat five times, three times per day.



2. Sitting or Standing: Bend sideways at the waist, until you feel a gentle stretch on the side you are stretching away from. Repeat five times, three times per day.



3. In a sitting position, cross your arms over your chest: Rotate your trunk to one side, hold for a few seconds and then repeat to the other side. Repeat five times, three times per day.



Suggested activity plan:

During your first week

It is important you continue with your exercises and consider taking short walks outside each day, increasing your distance gradually with each day.

It is very likely that you will feel some shortness of breath which should become easier.

Continue with your posture and deep breathing exercises.

Consider having a rest in the middle of the day.

From the second week

Start to increase activity at home by doing some light tasks such as cooking or washing up.

Avoid any pushing, pulling or lifting.

From four to eight weeks

You should be ready to take on more activities such as gardening and light shopping.

You should be able to walk longer distances.

Slowly increase the amount of activity as you feel able and try to take on more tasks around your home and garden.

You will normally be seen in Outpatients four to six weeks after the operation to see how well you are progressing. It is usual to have another chest x-ray at this appointment.

From eight to twelve weeks

Life should be returning to normal.

Your wound should be healed.

If you previously played sport you can start to do so again, but this should be a gradual process. You should consult your GP before undertaking competitive or contact sports.

Useful electronic resources:

Below are suggested resources to support pre and post-surgery activity including downloadable applications and websites.

1. Active 10 App.

A free to download app on Apple and Android devices. Provides a walking tracker, shows how briskly you walk and how you can do more. Aim for ten minutes brisk walking daily if able.

2. NHS Website - 10 Minute Workouts

A mixture of videos and advice on how to complete ten minute workouts for a range of levels, intensities and abilities. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-workouts/>

3. Couch to 5K

A free to download app and website. Provides full progressive exercise programme with the aim of completing more activity.

4. NHS Exercise Website

Provides guidelines, examples of exercise and motivational advice on how to improve fitness. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

5. NHS Strength and Flex Programme (Podcasts)

A structured programme aimed at improving overall strength and flexibility, adapted to all abilities. <https://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Strength-and-flexibility.aspx>

6. Activity trackers

A wearable device or downloadable application on most smart phones. Can help track activity levels as well as setting goals. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-health-check/tools-and-technology-that-can-help/>

7. Breathing and relaxation apps (Headspace/Calm)

Details how to relax using deep breathing and mindfulness with the aim to improve overall wellbeing.

Contact us

If you have any questions or queries about the information in this booklet, please contact Caroline Ward and ask for a message to be handed to Physiotherapy on 020 8725 1292 or 020 8725 3467.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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