

Managing your chest drain

Why do I have a chest drain?

You have a chest drain for one or both of the following reasons:

- to remove air from your pleural space
- to remove fluid or blood from your pleural space.



The pleural space is located between the lung and the chest wall. Usually this space is filled with a thin layer of lubricating fluid. The role of the pleural space is to maintain lubrication of the lung surface and promote lung expansion. When blood, fluid or air collect in the pleural space, the lung begins to collapse and cannot function adequately. If this occurs you may feel short of breath or experience pain.

How does a chest drain work?



A chest tube is used to remove air, blood or other fluid from the space between the lungs and the chest wall. The tube is placed into the pleural space and any air or fluid that has accumulated drains through the chest tube, into a drain. As the air or fluid is removed the lungs will expand and reinflate. The chest drain operates as a one-way valve, allowing air and fluid to escape from the pleural space into the drain, without letting the fluid/air back in again. It is therefore important to maintain the drainage system in an upright position, below the level of your chest.

Sometimes the doctor might want to put some gentle suction into the drainage system to help remove air and fluid. You will need to speak to the nursing or medical staff about how often, if at all, that the suction can be disconnected to allow you to move around.

How do I look after my chest drain?

The Do's...



Do inform the nurses or doctors if you have any pain

Do take regular deep breaths & splint your chest with a pillow when coughing



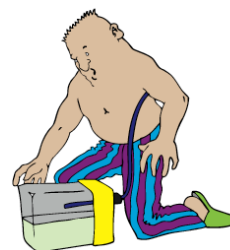
Do try to walk around the ward or bed area (ask the nurses for help if you are attached to suction)

Do use a chest drain trolley to support your chest drain, when walking.

Do ensure your chest drain tubing is well supported and not catching on the bed or rails

Do discuss future flying or scuba diving with your specialist

The Don'ts...



Don't knock your drainage chamber over

Don't kink or obstruct the chest drain tubing



Don't disconnect the suction unless the nurses or doctors agree that you can



When sitting in low chairs or toilets, don't raise the drain off the floor or designated holder



Don't lift the drainage chamber above your waist



Don't worry...your chest tube is stitched in; it should not fall out.

Golden Rule!

If you have any questions or concerns or feel that there is something wrong, please ask the nurse or medical staff.