



SOUTHEASTERN SURGICAL ASSOCIATES

DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

THORACIC SURGERY

Recovering from Thoracic Surgery

DIET: You may return to normal food after you go home from your surgery. Constipation can be a problem, in part from the stress of surgery and in part due to the pain medication. This can be avoided with the use of mild laxatives such as Milk of Magnesia or mineral oil, as well as increasing your liquid intake.

WOUND CARE: You may shower after you return home. Occasionally, the chest tube site may drain small amounts of blood and this may be covered with a band-aid or small gauze dressing. The incision may often feel as if it is burning; this will gradually return to normal. It is normal to have some bruising around the incision.

ACTIVITY: We encourage walking. You should plan an exercise program that includes two walks daily. You will be surprised by the steady increase in your exercise ability with these daily walks. Do not walk past the point of fatigue and/or shortness of breath but try to walk a little bit further every day. While you may find yourself initially short-winded, with the exercise plan this will improve over approximately six weeks. You should not drive while still taking the pain medications, and should not drive until your reaction time and strength have returned to normal. This usually occurs in 10 to 14 days. It takes about 3 months for complete healing your incision muscles. We recommend that you continue to use your spirometer at least four times a day until you are back to your normal activity pattern.

MEDICATIONS: Continue the medication that you were taking before surgery (for blood pressure, heart, etc.). Pain control is important; this is a painful operation and you will need pain medications... Please take your medications as prescribed; we will prescribe more should you run out and need more. You may find that warm showers on the incision actually help decrease the “tingling”/ “burning” sensation in the front of your chest more than the pain medications; this will subside with time.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS: It is not unusual to lose between five and ten pounds after a major thoracotomy and it may take up to 6-8 weeks to regain your preoperative weight. This weight loss is for the most part lost muscle mass (from the stress of surgery and the increased work of breathing), and until your weight is regained, you will find that you are easily fatigued. There is very little that will speed your weight gain except to maintain a good activity level and good dietary intake

CALL US IF: You develop enough drainage from the incisions to saturate a piece of gauze. Generally you will feel stronger and less sore with every day that passes. If after a few days you begin to feel worse, rather than better, you should call us. Call the office when you get home to schedule a check-up visit 10-14 days after your surgery. Finally, if you have any questions or concerns regarding your surgery or recuperation, do not hesitate to call our office—we are here to help in any way we can.