



Exercises and advice to help you recover after surgery

This leaflet explains your physiotherapy management following surgery. It will explore both the respiratory and rehabilitation aspects of what to expect after your operation. If you normally suffer from breathing problems, or if you have had an operation that involved a large incision (cut), then a physiotherapist may come and see you on the ward after surgery.

Not every patient will be seen by a physiotherapist, so this leaflet will give you some easy exercises and actions you can do yourself to help you recover from your operation.

Helping your lungs recover

General anaesthetic affects your lungs, plus the pain from your wound can make taking a deep breath and coughing difficult and painful. This means that sputum (mucus) can collect in your lungs. We encourage you to complete deep breathing, coughing and mobilising (moving around) after your surgery to help clear that sputum and prevent you from developing a chest infection.

It is important to start clearing any sputum as soon as possible straight after your surgery. Coughing will not damage any stitches or staples.

Pain

If you are in pain, use your pain relief button (if you have one). If not, then it is important you are taking your regular pain relief – make sure you have a supply of your regular painkillers at home and that you follow the dosage instructions.

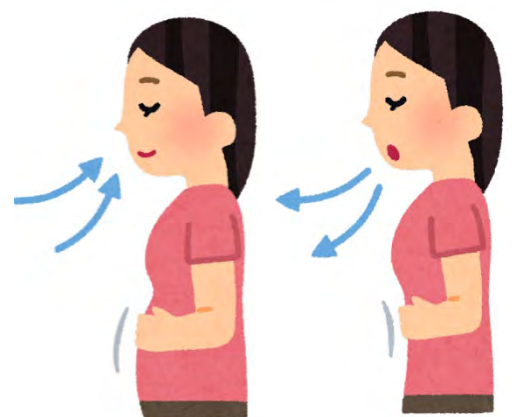
It is vital that you are comfortable enough to breathe deeply, mobilise and cough.

Breathing exercises

Do the following deep breathing exercises while sitting as upright as possible in the chair.

1. Relax your shoulders and upper chest.
2. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose to fill your lungs as full as you can.
3. Hold your breath for 3 seconds.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth.

Take 3 to 6 of these deep breaths, then rest.



Practice this exercise frequently, making sure you do it at least 3 to 4 times an hour whilst awake.

Incentive spirometry

If you have had an open surgery with a large wound you may have been given an incentive spirometer by a physiotherapist. This is to help you take deeper breaths and clear your chest effectively.

Complete 10 breaths **in** per hour through the incentive spirometer.



Coughing

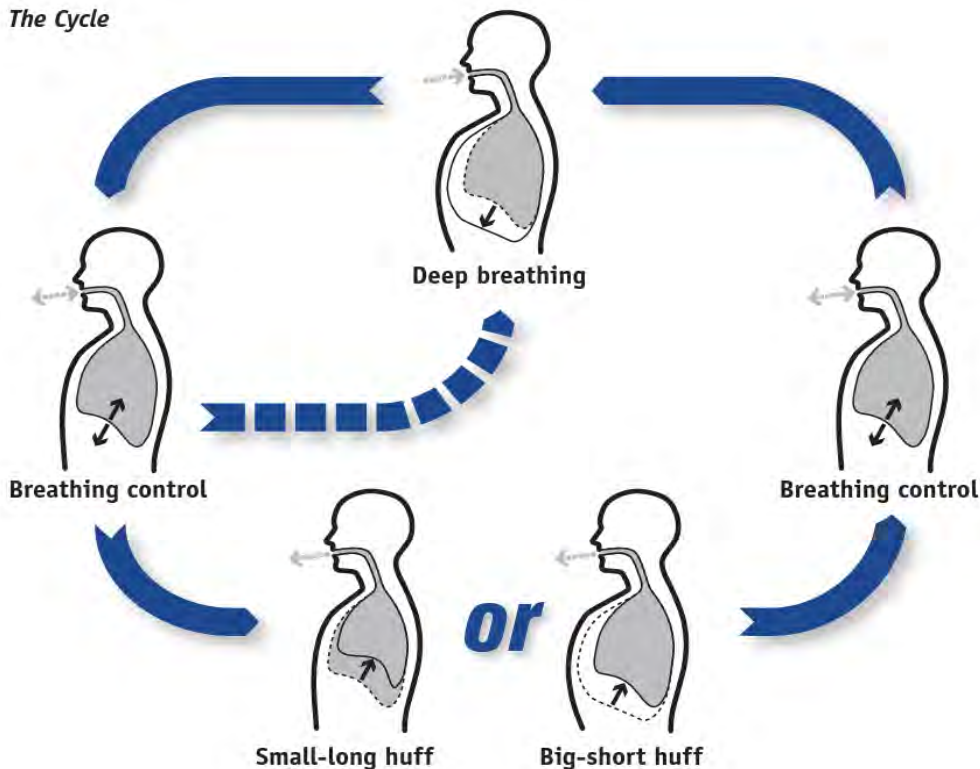
Coughing is the normal way to clear sputum from your lungs. You will need to do this more often in the first few days following your operation.

To help you cough, support your wound firmly with a towel or pillow (as pictured) – this will ease any discomfort from your wound.

Airway clearance

If you are finding clearing your chest more difficult than normal, you can use the Active Cycle of Breathing Technique (see below) to help:

The Cycle



Huffing is a forced breath out through your open mouth, as if steaming up a mirror.

You should aim to complete this cycle until you feel you have cleared the sputum off of your chest. Try to complete this at least twice a day (morning and evening).

If you'd like more information on this you can find this on the ACPRC website www.acprc.org.uk/Data/Publication_Downloads/GL-05ACBT.pdf.

If you don't have access to the internet, ask your physiotherapist to show you how to 'huff' before you leave hospital.

Bed based exercises

1. Ankle pumps – bring your toes up towards you then point them away 10 times with both feet. Rest and repeat three times. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	
2. Heel slides – Slowly bend your knee and hip, sliding your heel towards your bottom, then slide your heel away and straighten your leg. Do this 10 times on each leg. Rest and repeat 3 times. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	
3. Straight leg raise – Keeping your knee straight, slowly lift your leg off the bed as far as is comfortable and lower again. Do this 10 times on each leg. Complete this exercise within your pain limits. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	

Sitting out of bed

The best activity for your lungs is to get back up on your feet as soon as possible after your operation. Gentle activity will also help get your bowels working again and helps to keep your circulation moving.

The nursing or physiotherapy staff will help to sit you out of bed, either on the first morning after your operation or later the same day. Drips or drains can move with you and will not stop you from getting out of bed. You should aim to sit out of bed twice a day, gradually increasing the time each day.

Chair based exercises

1. Marching on the spot – While seated, march your legs up and down for a count of 10. Rest and repeat 3 times. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	
2. Calf raises – Lift your feet up onto your tip toes and back down for a count of 10. Rest and repeat 3 times. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	
3. Knee extension – Kick your leg out in front of you, hold your leg out straight for at least 3 seconds before lowering again. Repeat, kicking out the other leg. Do this 10 times, alternating each leg. Rest and repeat 3 times. Do this exercise at least twice a day.	

Walking

Walking after surgery is extremely important; this will start on the day of your operation or on the first day after your operation. The nursing staff or physiotherapy staff will help you until you can walk safely by yourself. Once you can do so, you will be responsible for walking regularly and increasing the distance that you can go.

You may feel some weakness and tiredness when you first start walking, but this is normal. Most people are moving around freely within 3-5 days of surgery.

The benefits of walking after surgery:

- promotes independence
- prevents chest infections
- prevents wound and urine infection
- reduces the risk of developing blood clots
- increases strength, fitness and endurance

Stairs

You will not routinely be taken to try walking up and down stairs unless you have a particular concern. If you are worried about going up or coming down the stairs after surgery, discuss it with your physiotherapist or nurse.

Contact us

For any queries or if you require advice regarding the use of the equipment you have been given, please contact the department on the numbers below:

General Surgical Ward: 0118 322 7539 or email RBFT.gsu@nhs.net

Surgical physiotherapists: 0118 322 7817

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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