What to Expect After Lung Surgery

This handout will help you know what to expect after lung surgery. It is important to share this information with your caregiver and family, so they know what care will be needed. If you have any questions talk to your doctor or others on your health care team.

- After your surgery, you will go to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU). A nurse will watch you closely and check your vital signs often as you are waking up. Once you are ready to leave the PACU, you will go to your hospital room.

- You may have one or more tubes in place after surgery. These may include:
  - Oxygen tubing
  - Intravenous (IV) catheter
  - Chest tube
  - Foley catheter in your bladder
  - Epidural catheter placed in the spinal area (lower back)

- Your incision will be covered with a dressing. The nurse will check your dressing and change it as needed.

- IV pain medicines or an epidural catheter may be used to help control your pain. Tell your nurse right away if you have pain.

- If you do not have nausea, you will be given clear liquids. If you can drink liquids without any problem you will then be given light foods. It may be a day or two before you can have regular food.

- Surgery and pain medicine may cause constipation (unable to have a bowel movement). Your nurse will ask about your bowel activity. Stool softeners and laxatives may be given to help with this problem.
• You will sit up in a chair and walk a short distance the day of your surgery. Each day the amount of time you are out of bed and the distance you walk will increase. You will be helped to a chair to eat all your meals.

• Walking is one of the most important activities you can do to help your recovery. You will be walking with the nursing staff starting the day of surgery and will walk at least 4 times a day after surgery.

• Your nurse will teach you how to use an incentive spirometer. This device is a breathing exerciser used to help you take deep breaths and keep your lungs clear after surgery. Deep breathing exercises help lower the chance of breathing problems, such as pneumonia, after surgery. It is important to use the incentive spirometer on your own to help with your recovery.

• Your health care team will teach you about the care you will need after you leave the hospital along with written instructions. Family and friends are encouraged to learn about your care so they can help you during your recovery.

When To Call Your Doctor

After you leave the hospital, call your doctor if you have any of the following:

• Shortness of breath, chest pain, chest tightness or breathing problems.

• Fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or higher.

• Signs of infection at your incision site such as redness, swelling, pus, odor or colored discharge.