Activity Guide after Chest Surgery

Sternal Precautions

During your surgery, your doctor had to cut the breast bone or sternum. When the surgery was done, the sternum was wired back together so it could heal.

For the first 6 weeks after surgery, use sternal precautions to protect your sternum as it heals. Follow these guidelines and any other instructions your doctor or health care team give you after surgery.

For the first 6 weeks after surgery:

• You may use your arms when getting in and out of your bed or a chair, but try to keep your arms close to your sides.
• When moving the first 2 days after surgery, hold a pillow across your chest to support your incision. We will show you how to do this.
• Hold a pillow across your chest to support your incision when you cough, sneeze or do your breathing exercises.
• You may move your arms within a pain free range, but avoid reaching backwards with both arms at the same time.
• Do NOT lift, push or pull more than 10 pounds. A gallon of milk weighs about 8 pounds.
• Do not let others push or pull on your arms when helping you to move. Have your helper hold onto a gait belt, waistband of your pants, or support you under your arm.

Being active after surgery is important for your healing, but we want you to be safe. If you try to do something and you feel your sternum pull, stop and avoid that activity until you check with your doctor. Talk to your doctor or any member of your health care team if you have questions about sternal precautions.

When to call your doctor

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:

• Swelling or opening of your surgery wound
• Increase in drainage from your wound
• Change in drainage that looks like pus or smells bad

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

The Library for Health Information is available to help you find more health information at (614) 293-3707 or e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.

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