Home Care of the Heimlich Flutter Valve

The Heimlich Flutter Valve is a one way valve that allows air to flow out of the chest through the chest tube when you breathe out (exhale), but prevents air from entering the chest when you breathe in (inhale). If air were to enter the chest tube when you breathe in, your lung would collapse. The valve is connected to a chest tube on one side and is either open to air or attached to drainage bag or Lukin’s trap that is open so the air can get out.

Care of the Chest Tube and Heimlich Valve

- Never clamp the chest tube or remove the flutter valve unless instructed to do so by your doctor.
- Firmly tape the connection where the chest tube and valve come together to prevent dislodging.
- Pulsation of the valve leaflet and/or a "honking or duck like sound" is normal.
- You should see the passage of air or fluids through the valve.
- Routine dressing changes should be done every __________ around where the chest tube enters the skin or if the dressing gets wet or dirty.
  - Gather your supplies and place on a clean work area:
    - Clean scissors

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☐ 4 x 4 gauze pads
☐ Chlorohexidine swab
☐ Alcohol pads
☐ 2 inch wide tape

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Remove the old dressing, being careful not to pull on the tube. Look at the skin around the tube for any signs of redness, drainage, odor or swelling. **If any of these signs are present, call your health care provider.**
- Wash your hands again with soap and water.
- Clean around the tube where it enters the skin with an Alcohol Pad and then a Chlorohexidine swab. Start close to the tube and work outward in a circular motion until an area of about 3 inches is covered around the tube.
- Let the area dry for 2 minutes.
- Use a clean scissors to cut one of the 4 x 4 gauze pads halfway down the middle. Place the gauze pad around the chest tube through the split.
- Put a regular 4 x 4 gauze pad over this area and tape all 4 sides down securely.
- Tape the Heimlich Valve to your body so there is no pulling or kinking of the chest tube.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

- Do not put the Heimlich Valve directly into water. Cover the valve with a plastic bag or wrap when taking a shower.
- If your Heimlich Valve pulls out of the chest tube, quickly put it back on. Watch to see if the valve flutters when you take deep breaths and breathe out.
When to Call Your Health Care Provider

- If your Heimlich Valve stops fluttering, this may happen for one of two reasons:
  - Either the air leak has stopped and you no longer need the valve, or
  - The chest tube is clogged or the valve is stuck shut.
    If a clot clogs the valve, call your health care provider to remove the clot. The Heimlich Valve needs to stay open and clear of clots to let the air flow out.
- Please call 911 for emergency medical help if you have sudden and/or severe shortness of breath.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.