

## *Greenwich Hospital*

### **What are Chest Tubes?**

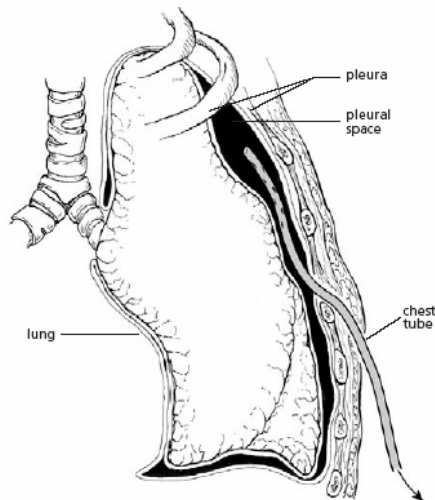
#### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What are chest tubes?**

Chest tubes (also called chest drainage tubes) are used to remove air, fluid or blood from inside your chest. You may have air, fluid or blood inside your chest because of an injury or illness. The pressure inside your chest may cause your lung to collapse. You may also have one or more chest tubes depending on your health problem.

#### **What happens during the procedure?**

- Your chest may be shaved in the area where the chest tube will be inserted.
- Your chest will be swabbed with an antiseptic solution. This may make your skin yellow, but it is cleaned off later with soap and water.
- Sheets are put over you to keep the surgery area clean.
- Medication may be given through your IV to make you relax, feel drowsy and to lessen your pain.
- Your skin will be numbed with a local anesthetic and then an incision (cut) will be made. More numbing medicine is put into your chest through the incision.
- The chest tube is inserted into the space between your lung and chest wall.
- The incision is closed with stitches.
- An airtight bandage is put over the incision and around the tube.
- A chest x-ray is taken to make sure the tube is in the right place.
- The chest tube is connected to tubing that drains air, fluid or blood into a container. This container may be connected to suction. Suction acts like a vacuum to gently remove air, fluid or blood from inside your chest. Your lung will re-inflate as the pressure from air, fluid or blood is removed.



Source: [www.ihc.com/xp/ihc/documents/pcmc/chesttube.pdf](http://www.ihc.com/xp/ihc/documents/pcmc/chesttube.pdf)

## **Is there any special care while the tubes are in place?**

**Activity:** You may need to rest in bed. Your caregiver will tell you when it is okay to get out of bed. Call for assistance before getting up for the first time. If you ever feel weak or dizzy, sit or lie down right away. Then call your caregiver.

**Deep breathing and coughing:** Hold a pillow tightly against your incision when you cough to help lessen the pain. Take a deep breath and hold the breath as long as you can. Then push the air out of your lungs with a deep strong cough. Put any sputum that you have coughed up into a tissue. Take 10 deep breaths in a row every hour while you are awake. Follow each deep breath with a cough.

**Incentive spirometer:** You may be asked to use an incentive spirometer, which is a small hand-held plastic device that you will breathe into to help keep your lungs clear. The nurse or respiratory therapist will show you how to use it.

**Blood work:** You may need blood drawn for testing. This is to monitor how your body is doing before and after surgery or a procedure. Common blood tests are arterial blood gases, abbreviated as ABG's.

**Chest X-ray:** This is a picture of your lungs and heart. Your doctor may order chest x-ray several times while your chest tube is in place. Your physician may also use the x-ray to look for signs of infection like pneumonia or a collapsed lung.

## **Are there any other considerations?**

- If you have swelling, redness, and/or drainage around the chest tube insertion site, this may indicate an infection and should be reported to your doctor right away. A temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or more may also indicate an infection.
- You may also experience subcutaneous emphysema, which is air trapped under the subcutaneous tissue of your chest. This will create a crackling or crumpling noise when the area is touched. This usually resolves on its own.
- If you go home with your chest tube(s) in place, your doctor may restrict your activity until it is removed. Check with your doctor regarding activity restrictions.

## **How are the chest tubes removed?**

The chest tube(s) will be taken out when your lung is working normally again. You will have a chest x-ray to make sure your lung is re-inflated. Caregivers will give you medicine for pain 30-60 minutes before the tube is removed. Your caregiver may ask you to take a deep breath and hold it or just to breathe normally as the tube is being removed. The incision is closed with stitches, and an airtight dressing is used to cover it.

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education 3/05*