

## Care for Patients After Major Abdominal Surgery

### Physiotherapy Directorate

This booklet has been designed by the physiotherapy service for patients undergoing major abdominal surgery, who require physiotherapy during their stay in hospital. We hope that this will help answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

### Why will I need physiotherapy?

After your surgery you may notice that you are more chesty than normal and there are a few reasons for this.

- (1) The anaesthetic **may** make you less able to breathe deeply
- (2) The wound on your stomach **may** make it more difficult for you to breathe deeply and cough
- (3) After your surgery you may be less active than normal

Your Physiotherapist will visit you in the days before your surgery. He/she will educate you about techniques, which will help you keep your chest clear and maintain your circulation. Here are some techniques you may find useful.

- **Deep Breathing exercises.**

Deep Breathing exercises are important to keep your lungs healthy. These exercises increase the amount of oxygen in your blood, promote healing of tissues and also help to prevent chest complications.

It is important to take 4-5 deep breaths every 15 minutes throughout the day when you are awake.

Sometimes secretions (mucus or phlegm) can build up in your lungs after surgery. It is important to clear your chest of these secretions to prevent infection. The easiest way to do this is by a combination of deep breathing and coughing.

Follow this sequence when doing your deep breathing exercises: -

- Breathe deeply in
- Pause for a second or two, then
- Sigh out gently
- Repeat this another 3-4 times, then
- Perform a fast breath out (HUFF) as though you are 'steaming up a window'.
- Rest for a few breaths
- Repeat until you feel there is no phlegm or you become tired.

**Whilst in bed, bend your knees or lean forwards if sitting in the chair.**

**Fully support your wound by placing both hands over the wound and applying firm pressure.**

- **Circulatory / Bed exercises.**

It is important after your operation to keep as active and mobile as possible. This is needed to help promote good circulation and prevent joint stiffness and/or muscle weakness. This can be achieved by bed exercises and walking on the ward: -

- Circle your feet and ankles frequently and move your ankles up and down
- Gently bend your knees up and down
- Straighten your knees and tense the muscles on the front of your thigh. Hold for a count of 5. Rest and repeat 5-10 times.

These exercises need to be performed every half an hour to benefit you. If you have any problems with these exercises, or any pain in your legs or another area, then STOP and let your physiotherapist and nurse know immediately.

### **Getting out of bed and walking**

Your physiotherapist or the nursing staff will get you out of bed as soon as possible after your surgery. Your physiotherapist will help you to increase your mobility as appropriate for you.

Your physiotherapist will visit you daily while you need physiotherapy during your inpatient stay. If you have any further questions do not hesitate to ask your physiotherapist.

This is a good exercise after surgery. Once home aim for a 10 minute walk every day, gradually increasing over the weeks.

### **When I go home can I lift / do housework?**

If possible avoid lifting anything for the first six weeks, gradually getting back to a normal level of activity after about 12 weeks. You can however do simple tasks like making a cup of tea.

### **Light lifting only for the first six weeks**

You should always avoid heavy lifts. Get someone to help and break the load down to smaller loads if possible.

### **If you need to lift use the following technique:-**

**Bend your knees and keep your back straight**

**Hold the object close to you**

**Pull in your tummy**

**Lift by straightening your knees,**

### **Posture**

Make a conscious effort to sit and walk up straight – try to avoid stooping and rounding of the shoulders. This prevents backache and the development of poor posture.

## **Rest**

Rest is as important as exercise. You may find that you tire easily at first. This will gradually improve. Do not compare yourself with others, the recovery period varies with each individual.

## **Can I drive?**

Check your insurance cover before you drive (some policies do not cover you for six weeks post-operatively). Take somebody with you the first time and progress slowly.

Given to you by your Physiotherapist: -

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Date: - \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any queries you can contact us on ext: - 8909.