

Let's Talk About...

Chest Tubes

What is a chest tube?

Outside the lungs there are several layers of protective lining called the pleura (plur-a). Fluid or air can collect between the pleura layers (called the pleural space). When this happens, the air or fluid pushes on the lung making it hard to breathe.

A chest tube is a small tube that is placed in the pleural space between the lung and the chest wall. The tube removes air or fluid from around the lungs to allow the lungs to fully expand.

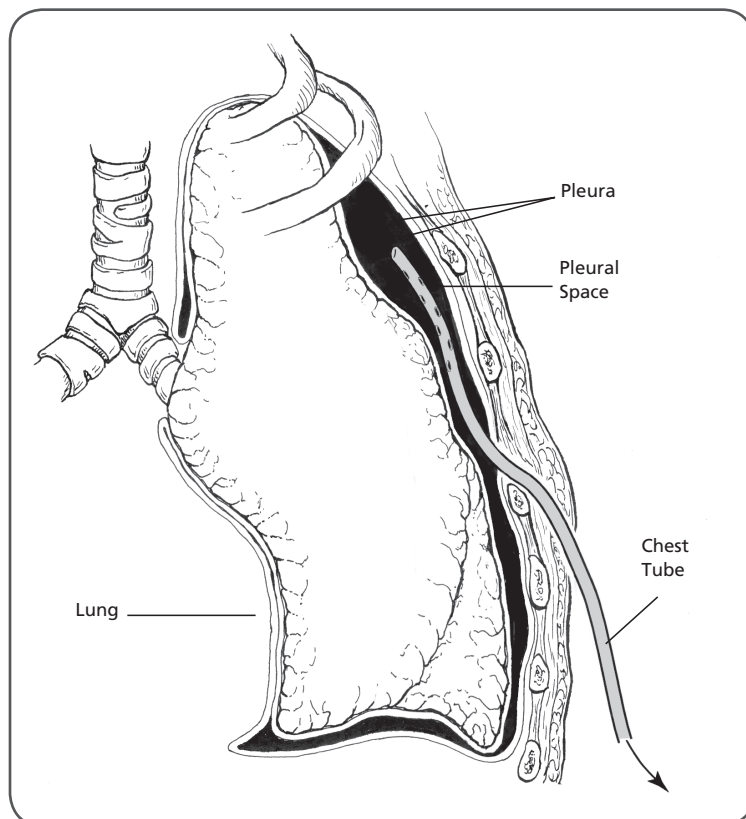
How will the chest tube be placed?

A chest tube is surgically placed by a trained physician. Medication will be provided to assist with any pain during the procedure and a pain plan will be put into place after the chest tube has been placed. A small hole will be made between your child's ribs on the affected side. The chest tube will be put through the hole and into the pleural space (see picture). The chest tube is held in place with a few stitches connected to the skin and covered with a large bandage. The chest tube is then attached to a longer tube and collecting system, so the fluid or air can drain out.

Why does my child need a chest tube?

Infection, inflammation, trauma to the chest, or surgery can cause fluid to build up in your child's pleural space. This fluid decreases the space around the lung, making it hard for your child to breathe. A chest tube will remove the fluid allowing the lung to fully expand and work normally. After the fluid drains, your child will be able to breathe more easily.

If there is a hole in the lung tissue, air can leak into the pleural space. This is called a pneumothorax (new-mow-thor-ax). The air in the pleural space



pushes on the lung. This causes part of the lung to collapse. This makes it hard to breathe. A chest tube takes the air out and lets the lung work normally.

When will the chest tube be taken out?

The chest tube can come out when there is very little or no fluid draining or when a chest x-ray reveals there is no longer air around the lung. When the tube is taken out, the stitches are left in the skin for a few days to allow healing.

What will my child feel?

Each child's experience is different. We will do our best to decrease your child's fear and anxiety by explaining the procedure and the equipment that will

be used. The descriptions below are comments made from other children's experiences.

When the tube is put in:

- The numbing medicine feels warm or stings when it is put in.
- The soap used to clean the area feels cold and wet.
- There's some pressure when the chest tube is inserted.
- There's some tugging as the stitches are placed.

When the tube is taken out:

- Children say it feels like the air was sucked out of their lungs. This happens quickly. Once the tube is out, there is no more pain.
- If a stitch is put in, it may feel like tugging or stinging.



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