

# Thoracotomy (Lung Surgery): Recovering at home

## Your surgery and recovery

**Thoracotomy** is surgery that treats a problem with the lungs. This surgery is used to:

- Diagnose or treat lung cancer or other lung diseases
- Repair lung injuries
- Remove infection, blood, blood clots, or fluid from the lungs or chest cavity

**Recovery after thoracotomy surgery can take 6 to 8 weeks.** During this time, you'll have follow-up appointments so your doctor can check your progress. The information in this fact sheet explains how to take care of yourself and speed your recovery at home.

## Constipation

Constipation is common after surgery. Try these tips to prevent or manage it:

- Include fruit, fiber, and bran in your diet.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Consider using a stool softener for as long as you're taking your pain medication. Pain medication can cause constipation.
- If you do become constipated, use a mild laxative. You can also try a small enema.

If these measures do not work, call your primary care doctor.



In the hospital, you will learn some range-of-motion exercises. To regain your strength and flexibility, you'll continue these at home. See page 3.

## Diet


**A balanced diet will help you feel better and heal faster.** During your recovery and after, aim to eat a well-balanced diet that focuses on:

- Protein to help tissues heal
- Fresh fruit and vegetables for vitamins and other important nutrients
- Fluids and fiber to help your bowels move

If your healthcare providers have given you a special diet to use, be sure to follow their directions.

## General activity

While you are recovering, rest whenever you begin to feel tired. Resume activities slowly, doing a bit more each day.

- **Avoid activities that put stress on your incision,** such as yard work or lifting anything over 10 pounds.
  - **Gradually increase your physical activity.** Walking is a good way to exercise. Start out slowly. As you can, add a little more walking time.
  - **To find out when you can return to work,** speak with your doctor.
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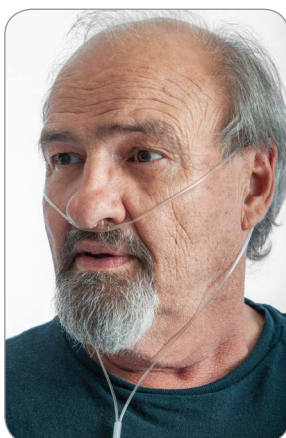


## Medication

Follow your doctor's directions for taking any prescribed medication. With pain medication, don't wait until the pain gets bad before you take it — follow your doctor's schedule and dose.

## Oxygen

You might also have oxygen at home during your recovery period. Follow the instructions given by the oxygen provider, and make sure you ask questions if there's anything you don't understand about using the oxygen.



## Questions for my doctor

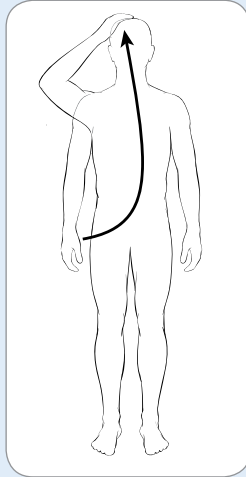
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## Range of motion exercises

Range of motion exercises help you regain flexibility and strength in your arms and shoulders. These exercises are easy to do, and you probably learned them in the hospital from a healthcare provider. It's important to keep doing these exercises 3 or 4 times a day while you recover from the surgery.

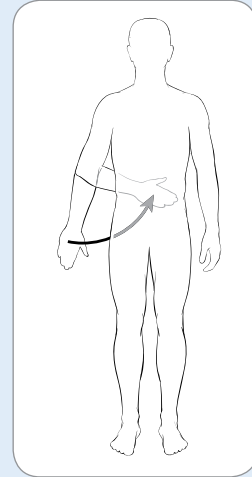
### Hand on head

- Bring your hand and arm forward to the center of your body.
- Slowly raise your arm until the palm of your hand can be placed on the top of your head. Keep your neck straight — don't bend it forward to meet your hand.



### Hand against back

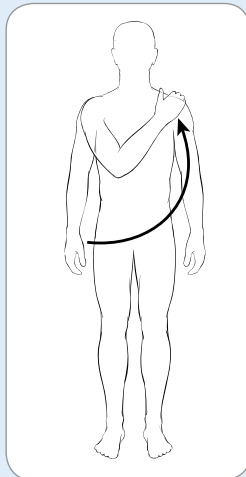
- Start with your arm down to your side, palm facing back.
- Bend your arm and place the back of your hand against your back. Reaching high up on your back is not as important as just getting the hand behind you.



### Hand to opposite shoulder

This exercise is part of the position you will need to support coughing.

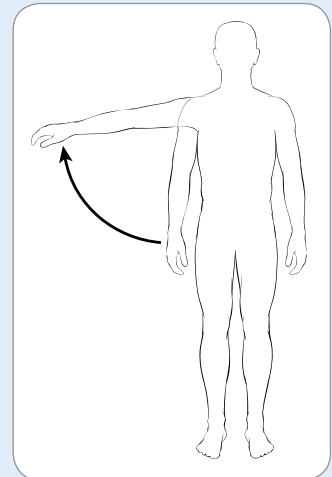
- With your palm facing your body, reach across your body.
- Grasp your shoulder on the opposite side.



### Arm up and out

At first try this lying down, using the bed for support. As you get stronger, sit or stand for this exercise.

- Bring your arm out to the side, with your palm facing down.
- Keep the arm straight and slowly raise it until it is level with your shoulder.



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