

Pre- and Post-Operative Breathing and Leg Exercises



Interior Health
Every person matters

Patient Information • Vernon Jubilee Hospital

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This handout contains some exercises recommended by the physiotherapy department to prevent complications of surgery.

Following your surgery you will be drowsy and may have some discomfort. This will cause you to take shallow breaths and lie still. Not moving allows blood to pool in your legs and can cause blood clots.

The anaesthetic you receive tends to increase mucous production in your lungs, combined with shallow breathing and lack of activity this can make you more prone to pneumonia.

To prevent these problems, we advise that you do the deep breathing and coughing and leg exercises as outlined in this handout every hour while you are awake. You need to change position every 2 hours or so, ask the nurse to help you if needed.

Deep Breathing Exercises

1. Place your hands on your stomach. Take a deep breath in through your nose, feel your stomach rise up as you breathe in. Hold for 2 to 3 seconds. Let the air out through your mouth. Do 3 times rest and repeat
2. Place your hands near the bottom of your rib cage (fig 1). Breathe in through your nose feeling your ribs move outward into your hands. Hold 2 to 3 seconds. Let the air out completely through your mouth, feeling your ribs move back inward (fig 2). Do 3 times rest and repeat.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Coughing Exercises

Bend your knees up or if allowed sit up in bed

If you have an incision on your chest or your stomach support the incision with your hands or a small pillow.



Take a deep breath, hold briefly, and then cough twice in a row with your mouth slightly open. Your cough should come from deep in the lungs.

If you find deep breathing and coughing too painful **ask for pain medication**, these exercises will not harm your incision.

Leg Exercises

Repeat each exercise 10 times. Do every hour while awake to keep the blood moving in your legs.

1. Move your ankles by pointing your toes away from you then pull your toes towards you
2. Circle your feet in both directions
3. Bend you knee sliding your heel toward your buttocks then straighten. Repeat with other leg.
4. Press the backs of your knees down into the bed, tighten your thigh muscles, hold 5 seconds then relax.
5. Squeeze your buttocks together, hold for 5 seconds then relax.

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	Dietitian	9 am–5 pm	Mon–Fri	
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