PHYSIOTHERAPY EXERCISES AND ADVICE AFTER ABDOMINAL SURGERY

LUNG CARE

The general anaesthetic you will have for your surgery affects your lungs and together with some pain from your wound, can make it difficult to take a deep breath and to cough and clear mucus. To keep your lungs healthy while you are recovering it is important to do some gentle breathing exercises. The exercises listed below should be started as soon as you are awake after your surgery.

Tri-flow Exercises

- With your mouth around the mouthpiece, take a deep strong breath in. (If you blow nothing will happen!)
- You should aim to lift 2 balls and make them hover at the top for 2-3 seconds
- Take the mouthpiece out before exhaling fully
- In each exercise session you should aim to perform 4-5 breaths X 3 sets with a rest between each set (i.e. 12-15 breaths in total)
- You should perform a session every hour that you are awake, and every time you wake up. This includes during the night when your nurse will wake you to do routine checks

Huff and Cough

After each tri-flow session you should perform the following to clear any loosened secretions from your lungs

- Hold a folded towel over your wound to provide support
- Take a medium sized breath in, then with your mouth open force the air out quickly, as though you are steaming up glass
- Repeat this 2-3 times, but if you hear or feel mucus when you huff, continue and try to clear the mucus with a cough

Sitting out of bed

The best exercise for your lungs is to get out of bed and start walking as soon as you can after your surgery. This will increase the amount of air going into your lungs as well as improve your circulation and promote bowel function.

You will be given assistance by your nurse or physiotherapist to sit out of bed on the first day after your surgery and they will continue to assist you each day until you are able to get out of bed yourself. Drips and drains move with you and will not stop you from sitting out of bed. You should aim to sit out of bed twice on the first day for about an hour each time. You should aim to increase this each day.
CIRCULATION

Bed rest and reduced mobility can lead to blood clots forming in the legs. The following exercises can reduce your risk of developing this complication. Perform them hourly when you are awake.

• Pump your feet up and down at the ankle vigorously 20 times
• Bend one knee up and down then the other side. Repeat 5 times on each side each side
• Push your knees down into the bed, feeling your thigh muscles tighten. Repeat this 10 times

WALKING AFTER SURGERY

Walking as soon as you can after your surgery will improve your lung function, circulation and promote bowel movement.

On the first day after your surgery your physiotherapist or nurse will assist you to walk a short distance, usually to the bathroom and back. They will continue to assist you each day until you can walk safely on your own.

Each time you stand up take a moment to stand up straight and ensure you are not dizzy before you start walking.

Some weakness and tiredness is expected when you first start walking after your surgery. Most people are moving around freely within 3-5 days after surgery. Short walks 2-3 times per day are best. Start by walking to the bathroom and back or in the corridor outside of your room and increase the distance as you feel safe to.

GETTING IN AND OUT OF BED

Using the incorrect technique to get in and out of bed will place more strain on your wound and cause more pain. The following technique will minimise strain on your wound. You should continue to use this technique once home for the first 6 weeks after your operation.

Getting out of bed

• Bend both knees up and roll onto your side
• With both arms in front of you, use your arms to push yourself up into sitting and at the same time lower your legs over the side of the bed
• In the first few days you will find it easier to use the electric bed control to help raise you into sitting once you are lying on your side.

Getting into bed

• Raise the back of the bed with the electronic control to about half way
• Sit on the edge of the bed as close to the inclined backrest as possible
• With both arms in front of you, use your arms to push yourself up into sitting and at the same time lower your legs over the side of the bed
• In the first few days you will find it easier to use the electric bed control to help raise you into sitting once you are lying on your side.

GOING HOME

You will likely feel tired in the first weeks after surgery so get plenty of rest, however don’t stay in bed. It is best to take short walks twice per day. Starting at 5-10 minutes and building up slowly until you are able to walk for 30-40 minutes comfortably at about 12 weeks. It is safe for you to go up and down stairs from when you go home.

Increases in abdominal pressure may place stress on your wound. The following activities should not be performed for the first 12 weeks after surgery.

• Heavy lifting
• High impact exercise such as running and jumping
• Sit-ups

You should discuss with your doctor when you will be able to drive.