

Chest Tube Home Care

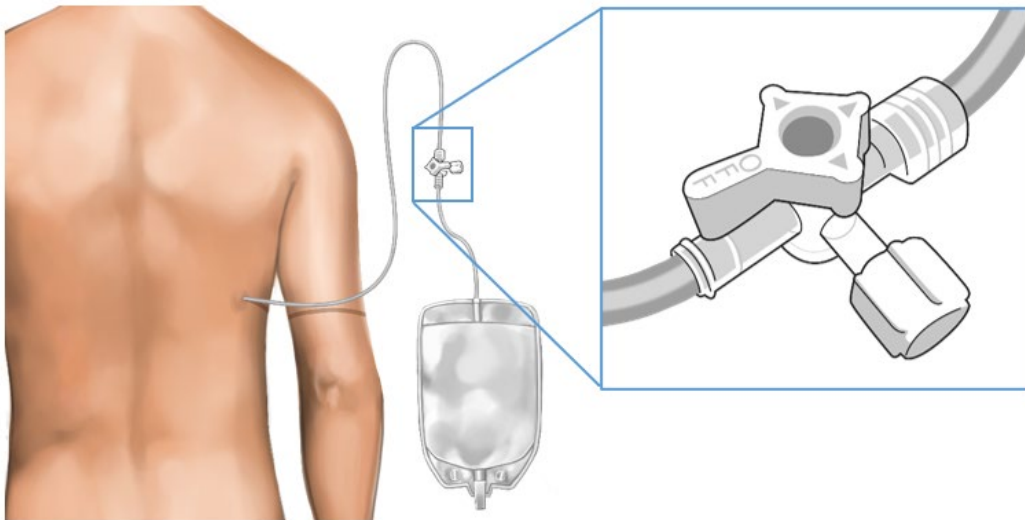
General information

You have had fluid buildup in the space between your lung and the lining that surrounds your lung (pleural space). This fluid makes it harder for you to breathe.

To help you breathe better, your doctor has decided to put a drainage tube (chest tube) in the pleural space to drain the fluid. You will be going home with this tube in place. It will be attached to a drainage bag that you will be taught to empty at home.

- It is important to keep accurate record of how much fluid you empty out of the bag each day.
- When almost all the fluid has been drained out of the pleural space, you will come back to see your doctor. Your doctor will have you schedule an appointment to come back to radiology to have the chest tube removed.

Important reminder - make sure the stopcock is in the OFF position when emptying the bag (see figure below).



How will I care for myself at home?

Dressing changes

Change the dressing every 1-2 days or after a shower.

1. Wash hands thoroughly
2. Remove old dressing
3. Clean around the tube with cotton balls moistened with hydrogen peroxide
4. Pat dry
5. Apply antibiotic ointment (Neosporin or Bacitracin) to the skin around the tube.
6. Apply a new clean dressing, being careful to position tube so that it does not kink.

Activity

- No bathtubs, hot tubs, or swimming.
- You may shower, however before showering cover the dressing with a double layer of plastic wrap (such as Saran Wrap) and tape the edges to your skin. After showering, remove the plastic wrap. Change the dressing if it has gotten wet.
- Avoid any activity that causes a pulling sensation, pain around the tube, or kinking of the tube.

When should I call for help?

Call Cross-Sectional Interventional Services if you have any of the following signs and symptoms:

- Increased pain where tube is inserted.
- Increased shortness of breath
- Fever greater than 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Tube stops draining or the drainage decreases to less than 20 milliliters in 48-hour period.
- If there is fluid leaking around the chest tube.

- If you have any questions or concerns.
- If tube falls out:
 - Cover the hole in the skin with gauze pads and tape.
- If you are having difficulty breathing, please go to the nearest emergency room immediately.

What is the contact information?

Call (734) 615-3486 between 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by University of Michigan Health and for which University of Michigan Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Ellen Higgins, P.A.-C
Edited by: Karelyn Munro BA

Patient Education by [University of Michigan Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 08/2021