

Breathing exercises after surgery

Enhanced recovery after surgery programme

TO BETTER GUIDE YOU

After your surgery, it's important to do breathing exercises to help your lungs work properly.

Why are breathing exercises important?

Breathing and coughing exercises are safe.
They will not harm your incision and help to prevent lung problems.

These exercises help you breathe more easily and clear mucus from your lungs. They can help prevent problems after surgery, such as:

- your lungs not fully expanding
- a lung infection (pneumonia)

It's important to get moving and start walking as soon as possible after your surgery. This will help you breathe better.

After surgery, your risk of breathing problems may increase if:

- the pain prevents you from breathing deeply and makes your cough less effective
- you smoke
- you move less

When should you do your breathing exercises?

Start your breathing exercises as soon as you wake up after surgery, unless you're told otherwise. Continue doing them until you return home.

How do you do your breathing exercises?

Your nurse or respiratory therapist will show you how.

The exercises can be done with or without an incentive spirometer. An incentive spirometer is a device that gives you a visual guide as to how much air you breathe in (see the photo on page 2).

Your nurse will give you one during your hospital stay.
Don't hesitate to ask if you didn't receive one.

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Take your time and take breaks during the exercise if you find it difficult.
This will help you maintain good technique.

Without a spirometer

1. Sit on a bed or in a chair.
2. Place one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Keep your mouth closed.
3. Breathe through the nose deeply and slowly. Your stomach should rise and move the hand on it. Hold your breath for 3 seconds.
4. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Your stomach should expand enough to make the hand placed on it move.
5. Hold this breath for 3 seconds.
6. Exhale slowly through your mouth as if you were blowing out a candle, until you have no air left.
7. After 15 deep breaths, cough (see the box below).

How to do the coughing exercise

- Sit up on a bed or in a chair.
- To reduce the pain and protect your incision, hold a pillow or rolled towel firmly against your incision with both hands.
- Breath slowly, hold your breath, and cough.
- If you have mucus, spit it out.
- If coughing is painful, ask for pain medication

With a spirometer

The spirometer helps you better see the improvement in your breathing.

1. Sit on a bed or in a chair.
2. Hold the spirometer in front of you, in an upright position. Make sure the tube is connected to the side labeled “patient side”.
3. Exhale through your mouth, until you have no air left.
4. Close your lips tightly around the mouthpiece.
5. Inhale slowly and deeply through your mouth. The ball inside should rise. Try to keep the ball at the top for 2 to 3 seconds.
6. Exhale through your mouth.
7. After 15 deep breaths, cough.

Several intensity levels on the spirometer

When you can repeat several inhalations and keep the ball at the top for more than 3 seconds each time, move to the next level.

To do this, turn the dial to a higher number.



Do you have any questions?

Talk to a member of your care team.
They are there to support you.

Texte adapté de la fiche santé *Les exercices respiratoires après une opération* produite par le Centre de littératie en santé du CHUM : **chumontreal.qc.ca/centre-litteratie-sante**.

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