



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# About Your Chest Tube Placement Procedure

This information describes what to expect when you have a chest tube placed while you're in your hospital room. This procedure can be done if you're having trouble breathing due to air or fluid around one of your lungs.

A chest tube is a flexible tube that's placed between your ribs, into the space between the inner and outer linings of your lungs (your pleural space). The chest tube will drain air, extra fluid, or both from the space around your lungs into a collection device (large plastic container) (see Figure 1).

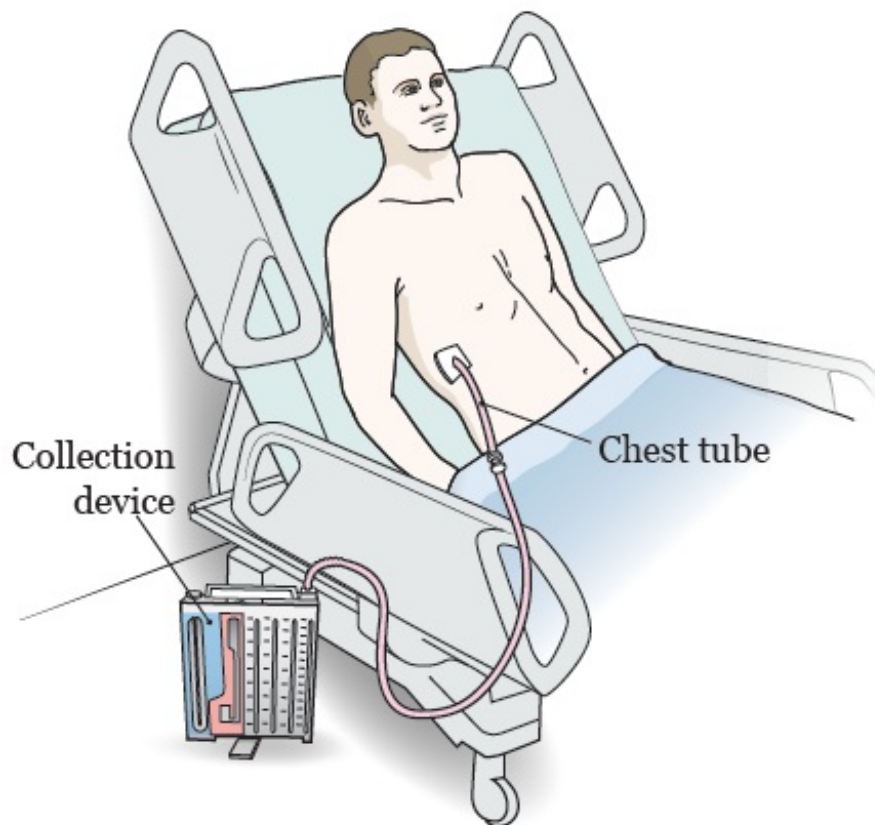


Figure 1. Chest tube and collection device

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This procedure is usually done in your hospital room while you're in your bed. Your healthcare provider will monitor your heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen levels throughout the procedure.

First, you will have an ultrasound scan (imaging scan that uses sound waves to create pictures of the inside of your body) while you're in bed. Your healthcare provider will use the scan to see exactly where to place the chest tube. Then, you will get an injection (shot) of local anesthetic (medication to make an area of your body numb) in that area.

After the area is numb, your healthcare provider will make a small incision (surgical cut). They will place the chest tube into the incision, between your ribs, and into the space around your lungs. You may feel some pressure when they're placing the tube. If you feel discomfort during the procedure, tell your healthcare provider.

Once the chest tube is in place, your healthcare provider will place a suture (stitch) to hold it in place and cover the area with a bandage. Then, you will have a chest x-ray to make sure the chest tube is in the right place.

## While You Have the Chest Tube

You may feel some discomfort or pain once the numbing medication wears off. If you do, tell your healthcare provider. They will check your chest tube and give you pain medication as needed.

Your healthcare provider will keep track of how much fluid, air, or both is coming from your chest tube throughout the day. You will also have chest x-rays to check how well your tube is working.

### Caring for your chest tube

It's important that your tube doesn't twist or bend so that it can drain properly. Keep the collection device upright and below your chest (see Figure 1). This will help the chest tube to drain.

You can sit up, lay down, and walk around while you have your chest tube. It's important to keep from pulling on your chest tube when you move around or walk. Ask your healthcare provider to help you move.

Take sponge baths while your chest tube is in place. Don't shower. Keep the bandage clean and dry. Tell your healthcare provider if it gets wet, is loose, or comes off.

Your chest tube will be removed before you leave the hospital. Your healthcare provider will give you more information about when it will be removed.

## When to Call Your Healthcare Provider

Call your healthcare provider if:

- You have shortness of breath (trouble breathing) that's very bad or getting worse.
- The pain on the side of your chest tube is getting worse.
- Your collection device falls over.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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