Caring for Your Chest Tube and Cook® Chest Drain Valve

This information will help you care for your chest tube and Cook chest drain valve after you’re discharged from the hospital.

About Your Chest Tube and Cook Chest Drain Valve

Your chest tube is a flexible tube that’s placed between your ribs, into the space near your lungs (your pleural space). A Cook chest drain valve is a one-way valve that connects to your chest tube (see Figure 1). Your chest tube and Cook chest drain valve let extra air and fluid out of your chest, letting your lung expand fully.

Figure 1. Chest tube and Cook chest drain valve

How long you will have your chest tube and Cook chest drain valve depends on your surgery and the amount of drainage you’re
having. Everyone’s drainage is different. Some people drain a lot, some only a little. You may be discharged from the hospital with your chest tube and Cook chest drain valve if you still have drainage or your lung is still leaking air after your surgery.

**Caring for Your Chest Tube**

Your chest tube will be covered with a bandage.

- Change your bandage every 7 days. Follow the steps in the “How to change your chest tube bandage” section. Your nurse will also show you how before you’re discharged from the hospital.

- If your bandage gets wet, dirty, comes loose, or starts to lift from your skin, change it right away.

Your chest tube may irritate your chest wall, causing some pain. Your doctor may give you a prescription for a pain medication you can take to help with the pain. If the medication doesn’t ease your pain, contact your doctor’s office.

**How to change your chest tube bandage**

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
   - Medical tape
   - 4 (4 inch x 4 inch) gauze pads
   - A clean pair of scissors
2. Clean your hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

3. Remove your chest tube bandage. Be careful not to pull your chest tube. Put the bandage in the trash.

4. Clean your hands again.

5. Clean the area around your chest tube with soap and water. Let the area air dry.

6. Open 2 of the gauze pads. Place 1 of the gauze pads on top of the other. Using clean scissors, cut a slit halfway up the middle of the gauze pads (see Figure 2).

7. Place the cut gauze pads around your chest tube at the insertion site (the place where your chest tube comes out of your body) (see Figure 3).

8. Open the remaining 2 gauze pads and place one of the pads on top of the other. Then, place them over your insertion site,
over the cut gauze pads around your chest tube.

9. Put medical tape over the entire bandage.

**Instructions for showering**

You can take showers, but it’s important to keep your chest tube bandage dry.

- Cover your chest tube bandage with a waterproof dressing (such as Aquaguard®) before you get in the shower.
- Use a hand-held showerhead, if you have one. A hand-held showerhead can help direct the water away from your bandage.
- If your bandage gets wet, change it. Wet bandages are a common cause of skin problems.

**Don’t take a bath, use a hot tub, go swimming, or submerge yourself in water while your chest tube is in place.**

**How to use an AquaGuard waterproof dressing**

Follow these instructions to put an AquaGuard waterproof dressing over your chest tube bandage before you shower. Make sure the AquaGuard sticks to your skin, not to your bandage.

1. Make sure the skin around your chest tube bandage is clean and dry.

2. Take the AquaGuard sheet out of the plastic packaging. The
edges of the AquaGuard have tape you can peel off. Fold over a corner of the tape on each side (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Folding the AquaGuard tape

3. Peel off the top strip of tape and place the top edge of the AquaGuard above your bandage. Press down firmly so it sticks to your skin.

4. Peel off one of the side strips of tape and press that edge against your skin. If there’s any extra material, pinch it together so it forms a pleat and fold it down.

5. Repeat step 4 with the opposite side of the AquaGuard.

6. Repeat step 4 with the bottom of the AquaGuard.

To take the AquaGuard off, start at the top left or right corner and gently peel the AquaGuard down. Try to peel it in the same direction that your hair is growing. Be careful not to pull on your chest tube bandage or chest tube.
Emptying Your Cook Chest Drain Valve

The first couple of days after surgery, the fluid draining from your chest may be dark red in color. This is normal. As you continue to heal it may appear pink or pale yellow.

If fluid is draining from your chest, your Cook chest drain valve will be connected to a small plastic container or a drainage bag. The type of collection device you have depends on how much fluid is draining.

If your Cook chest drain valve is connected to a small plastic container:

1. Check how much fluid is in the container. If it’s more than about 100 milliliters, call your doctor’s office after you finish emptying the container.
2. Open the container. Empty the liquid into the toilet.
3. Close the container. Wipe it with an alcohol pad. Flush the toilet.

If your Cook chest drain valve is connected to a drainage bag:

1. Check how much fluid is in the bag. If it’s more than about 100 milliliters, call your doctor’s office after you finish emptying the container.
2. Sit or stand so the valve at the bottom of the bag is over the toilet.
3. Open the valve so the liquid can drain into the toilet.

How often you empty your collection device depends on how much fluid is draining from your chest. Your nurse will tell you what to expect.

**Fixing a Disconnected Cook Chest Drain Valve**

*Your Cook chest drain valve should be connected to your chest tube at all times.* If it comes off your chest tube, follow the steps below to reconnect it right away, then call your doctor’s office.

1. Push the blue end of the valve into the end of your chest tube. Make sure it’s in the chest tube tightly.
2. Cough deeply a few times. This will help get rid of any extra air that may have built up around your lung while the Cook chest drain valve was disconnected.
3. Call your doctor’s office to tell them. If it’s before 9:00 AM or after 5:00 PM, a weekend, or a holiday, call 212-639-2000 and ask to talk to the doctor covering for your doctor.

**When to Call your Doctor**

Call your doctor’s office if:
• You have a fever of 101 °F (38.3 °C) or higher.
• The skin around your chest tube is red, puffy, or feels warm or painful when you touch it.
• Drainage is coming from around your chest tube site.
• You have pain that isn’t eased by your pain medication.
• More fluid is draining from your chest tube than usual.
• The color or thickness of the fluid draining from your chest tube changes.

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 to search our virtual library.

Caring for Your Chest Tube and Cook® Chest Drain Valve - Last updated on November 27, 2019
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