

## Information for Patients

### Care for Patients after Major Abdominal Surgery

### Physiotherapy Service

This information has been designed by the Physiotherapy service for patients undergoing major abdominal surgery. We hope that this will help answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

#### **Why will I need physiotherapy?**

After your surgery you may notice that you are more chesty than normal and there are a few reasons for this:

- (1) The anaesthetic may make you less able to breathe deeply
- (2) The wound on your stomach may make it more difficult for you to breathe deeply and cough
- (3) After your surgery you may be less active than normal

Your Physiotherapist will educate you about techniques to help you keep your chest clear and maintain your circulation. You may find these techniques useful.

Deep Breathing exercises are important to keep your lungs healthy. These exercises increase the amount of oxygen in your blood, promote healing of tissues and also help to prevent chest complications.

It is important to take regular deep breaths every 15 minutes throughout the day when you are awake.

Sometimes secretions (mucus or phlegm) can build up in your lungs after surgery. It is important to clear your chest of these secretions to prevent infection. The easiest way to do this is by a combination of deep breathing and coughing.

Follow this sequence when doing your deep breathing exercises:

- Breathe deeply in
- Pause for a second or two, then
- Sigh out gently
- Repeat this another 3-4 times, then

- Perform a fast breath out (HUFF) as though you are 'steaming up a window'
- Rest for a few breaths
- Coughing regularly is very important following your surgery to prevent infection

To make this more comfortable, fully support your wound by placing either hands or a folded towel over the wound and applying firm pressure.

### **Circulatory / Bed exercises**

It is important after your operation to keep as active and mobile as possible. This is needed to help promote good circulation and prevent joint stiffness and/or muscle weakness. This can be achieved by bed exercises and walking on the ward:

- Circle your feet and ankles frequently and move your ankles up and down
- Gently bend your knees up and down
- Straighten your knees and tense the muscles on the front of your thigh

Hold for a count of 5.

Rest and repeat 5-10 times.

These exercises need to be performed every half an hour to benefit you. If you have any problems with these exercises, or any pain in your legs or another area, then STOP and let your physiotherapist and nurse know immediately.

### **Getting out of bed and walking**

If you are following the Enhanced Recovery Protocol, your physiotherapist or the nursing staff will get you out of bed if possible the day after your surgery. Even if you are not strictly following this protocol, you will mobilise as soon as is appropriate following your surgery.

Your physiotherapist will visit you daily while you need physiotherapy during your inpatient stay and will help you to increase your mobility as appropriate for you. If you have any further questions do not hesitate to ask your physiotherapist.

Walking is a good exercise after surgery. Once home aim for a 10 minute walk every day, gradually increasing over the weeks.

### **When I go home can I lift / do housework?**

If possible avoid lifting anything for the first six weeks, gradually getting back to a normal level of activity after about 12 weeks. You can however do simple tasks like making a cup of tea.

### **Light lifting only for the first six weeks**

You should always avoid heavy lifts.

Get someone to help and break the load down to smaller loads if possible.

### **If you need to lift use the following technique:**

- Bend your knees and keep your back straight
- Hold the object close to you
- Pull in your tummy
- Lift by straightening your knees

### **Posture**

Make a conscious effort to sit and walk up straight – try to avoid stooping and rounding of the shoulders. This prevents backache and the development of poor posture.

### **Rest**

Rest is as important as exercise. You may find that you tire easily at first. This will gradually improve. Do not compare yourself with others, the recovery period varies with each individual.

### **Can I drive?**

Check your insurance cover before you drive (some policies do not cover you for six weeks post-operatively). Take somebody with you the first time and progress slowly.

**If you have any queries please speak to the physiotherapist on the ward.**

**This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn  
Gymraeg**