

Esophagectomy Discharge Instructions

Always follow your surgeon's instructions. Ask your care team any questions you may have.

Incision Care

- Wash your incision daily with antibacterial soap and water.
- Do not peel off the Steri-strips™. They may fall off on their own. You may remove these 7 days after your discharge.

Chest Tube Site

- Keep the dressing over the chest tube site for 2 days.
- Once the dressing is removed, wash the incision area every day.
- If there is still drainage, wash the incision site with soap and water. Cover the site with clean gauze and tape. Change the dressing every day until there is no drainage.
- If drainage soaks through the dressing at any time, change to a clean, dry dressing.

Activity

- **Do not** take baths or swim for 4 weeks. You may take showers.
- **Do not** lift anything heavier than 15 pounds for 4 weeks. Do not strain in any way.
- **Do not** lie flat. Sleep at a 20 degree angle. You get a special wedge pillow at discharge.
- You may resume sexual activity when you wish.
- You may resume driving 2 weeks after surgery. **Do not** drive while you take pain medicines.
- Walk and move around often. Slowly increase the distance and time you walk each day.
- Do breathing exercises (with the incentive spirometer) several times a day for 4 to 6 weeks as instructed.
- Hold your teddy bear or pillow firmly pressed against your belly wound while coughing. Do this for 4 to 6 weeks after surgery.


Feeding Tube

Continue to follow your care team's instructions for J-tube feedings. Your doctor will decide when you can stop tube feedings.

Cleaning the J-Tube

- Clean around the tube with mild soap and water every day.
- Apply antibiotic ointment around the tube 2 times a day.
- Flush the tube with water before and after each feeding.
- Flush the tube with water before and after all medicines.
- Flush the tube with water 3 more times a day to keep it open.

Keeping the J-Tube Secure

- Always keep the J-tube closed, except for when you use it to give yourself a feeding.
 - The tube should always be secured to your body with a suture and tape. Make sure that the tube is securely taped to your body. Tell your doctor if the sutures become loose. It is common for sutures to become loose.
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- If the tube comes out when you are at home:
 - **Rinse the tube with warm water right away.**
 - Gently try to re-insert the tube along the tract.
 - Re-tape the tube in position.
 - Contact the Thoracic Clinic.
 - Go to the MD Anderson Acute Cancer Care Center for an x-ray to check the placement of the tube. (If you are not in the Houston area, go to the nearest hospital emergency center.)
Do not use the tube until your x-ray confirms the tube placement is correct.
 - If the tube does not go in easily, **stop** and **contact your nurse or doctor right away**, or go to the nearest hospital emergency center.
 - **If the tube comes out, it is very important that you try to replace the J-tube right away. A delay of 2 to 3 hours may cause the tract to close and will require a surgical procedure to replace the tube.**

Bowel Management

- Pain medicines can cause constipation.
- Try to have a bowel movement every 1 to 2 days.
- Do not strain while having a bowel movement.
- To help decrease constipation problems, increase your activity each day.
- You may receive a prescription for a mild laxative and stool softeners.
- If you continue to have constipation, diarrhea or dumping syndrome (food moving too quickly through the stomach into the small intestines), tell your nurse.
- Stop taking stool softeners if you have loose stools or diarrhea.

Symptoms to Report

Call your doctor right away, or go the nearest hospital emergency center if you have any of these signs or symptoms:

- Signs of infection include:
 - Redness
 - Swelling
 - Tenderness
 - More drainage or bad odor from incision site(s)
 - Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher
 - Chills
- Nausea or vomiting that does not go away
- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain or heart palpitations

For questions or concerns, call:

The Thoracic Center

Main Building, Floor 9, near Elevator B
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
713-792-6110

MD Anderson Acute Cancer Care Center

Main Building, Floor 1
24 hours a day, every day

After 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and on weekends, call the hospital main number at 713-792-2121. Ask for the on-call thoracic surgeon.