

# Discharge Instructions After Treatment for Lung Cancer



You have been diagnosed with lung cancer. This is the abnormal and uncontrolled growth of cells in the lung. Treatment for lung cancer may include surgery, chemotherapy (or other medicines), radiation therapy, or a combination of these. This sheet gives you tips on how to care for yourself after treatment. Follow any specific instructions your healthcare providers give you. Before you go home, be sure you understand them and ask questions if you need more information.

## Home care after surgery

Here's what to do at home after surgery for lung cancer.

## Activity

Do's and don'ts include:

- Rest when you are tired. Don't worry if you are extremely tired (fatigued). Fatigue and weakness are normal for a few weeks. This will get better over time.
- Limit your activity to short walks. Slowly increase your pace and distance as you feel able. If you have stairs in your home, take one step at a time and go up and down slowly. If you can, set up your home so you don't have to climb stairs very often. To prevent falling or tripping, make your home safe by removing rugs or obstacles. You may need help getting in and out of a shower or tub.
- Don't do any strenuous activities, such as mowing the lawn, using a vacuum cleaner, working out, playing sports, or sexual activity. Ask your healthcare team when you can start these types of activities again.
- Listen to your body. If an activity causes pain, stop. Deep breathing may cause some pain at the cut (incision) site. This is normal.
- Don't drive until you are free of pain and no longer taking prescription pain medicine. This may take 2 to 4 weeks. Ask when you can drive again.
- Don't sit with your legs hanging down and don't stand still for long periods.
- Don't lift or carry anything heavier than 10 pounds until your healthcare provider says it's OK to do so.
- It is normal to take time off from work after lung surgery. Ask your surgeon when you can go back to work. Be sure to describe the type of activity your job requires.

## Incision care

Suggestions for caring for your incision include:

- Leave the small, white, wound-closure strips over your incision in place for 7 to 10 days after your surgery. The strips usually fall off on their own.
- Always keep your incision clean and dry.
- Shower as needed. Wash your incision gently with mild soap and warm water and pat dry. Don't scrub your incision. Ask when it's OK to soak in a bathtub, swimming pool, and hot tub.
- Press a pillow over your incision area when you need to sneeze or cough.

## Other home care

Suggestions for other home care include:

- Take pain medicines as instructed by your surgeon.
- Call your healthcare provider if you are coughing up brownish mucus (sputum) or blood.
- Learn to check your own pulse. Keep a record of your results. Ask your healthcare provider which pulse rates mean that you need medical attention.
- Check your temperature every day for 7 days after your surgery.
- Use your incentive spirometer 5 times a day for the first 2 weeks you are home.
- Return to your regular diet as you feel able. Try to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Try to prevent constipation:
  - Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
  - Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day, unless directed otherwise.
  - Use a laxative or a mild stool softener if your healthcare provider says it's OK.

## Home care after chemotherapy or other medicines to treat lung cancer

Here's what to do at home after chemotherapy for lung cancer.

### Prevent mouth sores

Many people get mouth sores during chemotherapy. It depends on the type of medicine. So don't be discouraged if you do, even if you are following all your healthcare provider's instructions. Do the following to help prevent mouth sores or to ease pain:

- Brush your teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush after every meal.
- Don't use dental floss if your platelet count is low. This increases your risk of bleeding. Your healthcare providers will tell you if this is the case.
- Use an oral swab or special soft toothbrush if your gums bleed during regular brushing.
- Use any mouthwashes given to you as directed. Don't use mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- Use salt and baking soda to clean your mouth and keep it moist. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda into an 8-ounce bottle of warm water. Shake before each use. Swish and spit as often as you like.
- Watch your mouth and tongue for white patches. This is a sign of fungal infection, a common side effect of chemotherapy. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about these patches. You may need prescription medicine to help you fight the fungal infection.

### Manage other side effects

Suggestions to handle other side effects include:

- Try to exercise. Exercise keeps you strong and keeps your heart and lungs active. It can also help chemotherapy-related fatigue (extreme tiredness). Walk as much as you can without becoming dizzy or weak. Ask your healthcare provider what exercises are safe for you.
- Wash your hands often and stay away from people who are sick. During treatment, your body can't fight germs very well.

- Take short baths or showers with warm water. Stay away from very hot or cold water.
- Use moisturizing soap. Treatment can make your skin dry.
- Use moisturizing lotion several times a day to help relieve dry skin. Don't use lotions that contain alcohol that can cause dry skin.
- Let your healthcare provider know if your throat is sore. You may have an infection that needs treatment.
- Remember, many people feel sick and don't feel like eating during treatment. Eat small meals several times a day to keep your strength up. And do the following:
  - Choose bland foods with little taste or smell if you are reacting strongly to food.
  - Cook all food thoroughly. This kills bacteria and helps you prevent infection.
  - Eat foods that are soft. Soft foods are less likely to cause throat irritation.

## Home care after radiation

Here's what to do at home after radiation for lung cancer.

## Skin care

Do's and don'ts include:

- Don't rub, scrub, scratch, or use soap on the treated area.
- Ask your therapy team which lotions and skin products to use.
- Keep the treated area out of the sun. Ask your therapy team about using a sunscreen.
- Don't remove ink marks unless your radiation therapist says it's OK. Don't scrub or use soap on the marks when you wash. Let water run over them and pat them dry.
- Protect your skin from heat or cold. Don't use hot tubs, saunas, heating pads, or ice packs.
- Wear soft, loose clothing to prevent rubbing your skin.

## Other home care

Suggestions for other home care include:

- Stock up on easy-to-prepare foods.
- Eat foods high in protein and calories.
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids, unless directed otherwise.
- If your mouth or throat becomes dry or sore, sip cool water. Ice chips may also help.

## Follow-up care

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your healthcare providers.

## When to get medical care

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following:

- Any chest pain or shortness of breath
- Fever of 100.4° F ( 38°C ) or higher
- Chills
- Any unusual bleeding
- Signs of infection around the incision, such as redness, drainage, warmth, and pain
- Incision that opens up or pulls apart
- Trouble concentrating
- Ongoing fatigue
- Rapid, irregular heartbeat
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Constant feeling of being cold
- New or unusual lumps, bumps, or swelling
- Persistent coughing
- Brown or bloody sputum
- Trouble passing urine or changes in how your urine looks or smells
- Persistent nausea or diarrhea
- Swelling, pain, redness, or warmth in an arm or leg

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