Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Chest Drain

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Chest Drain

Patient Information

Respiratory Service

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What is a chest drain?

A chest drain is a tube that is put between the ribs and the space between the lung and the chest wall (known as the pleural space). The tube is attached to a bottle. It will help your lung expand again or remove any extra fluid/blood or pus. This is a very common procedure, and it will be discussed with you before it happens.

Why would I need a chest drain?

There are a few different reasons why you might need a chest drain, these include:

- Collapsed lung (pneumothorax)
- Blood around the lung after trauma/fall/surgery (haemothorax)
- Pus in the pleural space (Empyema)
- Fluid in the pleural space (pleural effusion)

Please see diagram below:



Will I need to remain in hospital to have the chest drain put in?

Yes, you will need to have the procedure in the hospital but in some cases you can de discharged and return but this will be discussed with you by the doctor.

Who will insert the chest drain?

A qualified doctor or nurse with experience will insert the drain. However, as we are a teaching hospital, sometimes a newly qualified doctor will be supervised by a doctor who is already fully trained in the procedure, but this will be discussed with you beforehand.

Before inserting the chest drain, the procedure will be discussed with you (and your family if you wish), and you will be asked to sign a consent form to make sure you understand the procedure.

Will I have any pain or discomfort when the drain is in?

Some patients do feel pain, discomfort or aching around the tube. We will make sure you have painkillers prescribed, and if you feel you need these, please ask the ward team.

Can I walk around with the chest drain in?

Yes, we advise you to continue to walk around the ward if you can, but make sure you take the chest drain bottle with you and keep the bottle at waist height. If you have any questions, please ask the ward staff before you walk around.

How long will I have a chest drain in for?

It all depends on the reason why the drain was inserted. This will be discussed with you by the ward team. Chest X-Ray (CXR) and CT imaging can be helpful to check that the lung is reinflated, or that the fluid has reduced.

How is a chest drain removed?

Removing the chest drain is a simple procedure. You will be asked to sit in an upright position if you can. The dressing will be removed and the suture that is securing the drain in place will be taken out. When ready, the doctor/nurse will ask you to take a deep breath in, then slowly breath out. When breathing out, the tube will be removed. This should not be painful, but has been described as a ‘different sensation’. Sometimes a suture is required to close the site; if this is the case, the ward team will advise on removal of this suture at a later date. A dry dressing will then be applied.

How long do I need to keep the dressing on after the drain has been removed?

24 hours, then it can be removed.

Will I have a stitch after the drain has been removed?

Not always. If you do need a stitch after the drain, you will be informed and the Community Teams will be contacted to remove it at a later date.

Will I have an appointment to see the doctor after I am discharged?

This is dependent on why you needed the chest drain. You will be told if you need a follow-up.

Can I fly after having a chest drain?

Yes, after the drain is removed, we advise you not to fly for 14 days after a collapsed lung. Speak with your doctor before flying.

Can I go scuba diving after having a chest drain for a collapsed lung?

Doctors will say No, as sometimes the underlying cause for the collapsed lung or effusion is unknown; if this is the case, please speak with your doctor.

Can I continue to go the gym after a drain has been removed?

Yes, but we advise you to avoid strenuous/heavy lifting when going to the gym; listen to your own body and speak with your doctor before resuming strenuous exercise.

Do I need to stop smoking or vaping?

Yes; if you smoke or vape, we strongly advise you to stop. We can offer smoking cessation referral to you whilst in the hospital and when at home. Please speak with the ward staff about this



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