Recovery after a Breastbone Repair

_with Ravitch Surgery_

**For 6 to 12 weeks:**

- Do not twist your upper trunk to the right or left.
- Do not log roll (risk of twisting).
- Do not push or pull with one hand or arm.
- You should not lift or carry more than 10 pounds. This applies to a backpack as well.
- Carry equal weight on both sides of your body. Use both shoulder straps with a backpack.
- Do not return to sports for 3 to 6 months.

Talk to your surgeon if you have other questions.

**Do not do these movements (cause twisting)**

- Reaching across body to the opposite side
- Turning to look over your shoulder while sitting
- Washing the left leg with your right arm, or the right leg with your left arm
- Casting a fishing pole; swinging a bat or racket; golfing
- Throwing a ball overhand
- Looking over your shoulder while driving or riding in a car

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, please let us know. We provide many free services including sign language interpreters, oral interpreters, TTYs, telephone amplifiers, note takers and written materials.
How to get out of bed

Since it is not safe to roll to your side, your therapist and nurse will teach you another way to get out of bed. Your goal is to get out of a flat bed on your own before you go home.

1. The first day or two, put the head of the bed up as far as comfortable.
2. Walk both legs toward the side of the bed, without twisting your upper body.
3. Lean trunk forward from the back of the bed. Use your elbows to push yourself up or have someone assist behind your shoulder blades.
4. Scoot yourself to the edge of the bed by leaning to one side and “walking” the opposite hip forward. Repeat as needed.

Other options are sleeping on a wedge pillow or in a recliner chair.

Why physical therapy?

Physical therapy trains you to get out of bed safely, do transfers, walk and climb stairs. The surgery expanded the space inside your chest. This allows your heart, lungs and shoulders to work better. The home exercise program will help you make the most of the new space by improving posture, breath support, arm range of motion and endurance.

Why occupational therapy?

You will have occupational therapy (OT) as needed. OT trains you for the tasks of daily living after surgery. This might include: showering, bathing, dressing and using the toilet.

Goals for a safe discharge to home

- You are able to lie flat to improve range of motion and breathing.
- You are able to get in and out of bed safely without help.
- You can walk without help at least a ½ lap of the unit (about 250 feet).
- You can walk up and down stairs without help.
- You are able to care for yourself and understand the home exercise program.

Home exercise program

Your therapist will teach you the exercises. Do them 1 to 2 times each day. Follow this program until you have no pain when you exercise and are able to return to your former activities. You may add weight to the arm or shoulder exercises (up to 10 pounds). Keep the weight equal on both sides.

Posture

Standing posture

Good posture improves breathing and helps avoid pain. Try not to slouch and thrust your head forward. Line up your ears over shoulders and hips over ankles. It is normal to have a curve in your low back.

Lying flat

Lying flat is important after surgery to prevent tight muscles in the front of your chest and hips. It also provides a gentle stretch and improves posture in the spine.
Breathing exercises

**Chest breathing into the sides**

Place hands on lower sides of rib cage. Breathe in, making the chest wall expand on each side. Hands and elbows will move out. Breathe out gently through pursed lips. Repeat ___ times, ___ times a day.

**Breathing from the stomach (with diaphragm muscle)**

Place one hand on stomach. Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting the stomach rise. Breathe out gently through pursed lips, letting the stomach fall. Breathe out for at least twice as long as you breathe in. Repeat ___ times, ___ times a day.

Exercises for posture and rib cage

**Shoulder shrugs**

Shrug shoulders up and down, forward and backward. You may add up to 10 pounds of weights (keep weight equal). Repeat ___ times per set. Do ___ sets per session. Do ___ sessions per day.

**Shoulder blades**

Move shoulder blades down and toward each other. Breathe in when moving shoulder blade back. Breathe out when relaxing. Repeat ___ times per set. Do ___ sets per session. Do ___ sessions per day.
Shoulder flexion
With thumbs pointing up, lift one or both arms toward ears. Breathe in when lifting arms. Breathe out when lowering arms. You should not feel sharp pain.
Repeat ___ times per set.
Do ___ sets per session.
Do ___ sessions per day.

Shoulder abduction
With thumbs pointing up, bring one or both arms up and out from the side as if doing a jumping jack. Breathe in when lifting arms. Breathe out when lowering arms.
Repeat ___ times per set.
Do ___ sets per session.
Do ___ sessions per day.

Aerobic exercise
It is important to get regular aerobic exercise after surgery. This will increase your heart and lung endurance. As you get stronger, you will have less pain and shortness of breath when you are active.
Safe activities include:
- Walking
- Stair climbing
- Stationary biking
Start with 5 to 10 minutes and increase 1 to 2 minutes each week as you are able.
Long term goal: 30 minutes of steady activity.