

Video Assisted Thoracic Surgery - VATS also called Thoracoscopy

What is video assisted thoracic surgery or VATS?

VATS is a way to do surgery using a video camera to see inside the chest. It is also called thoracoscopy.

The surgeon makes 2 or 3 small incisions in the skin on the chest. One incision has a thin telescope tube that is attached to a video camera and television screen. The surgeon puts the instruments for surgery through these other incisions. The surgeon then operates by looking at the television screen.

With the video camera, the surgeon can see all of the structures inside the chest easily.

The benefits of thoracoscopy are that wound healing is faster and there is less pain since the incisions are small.

Why do I need a thoracoscopy?

Many procedures can be done this way. You will have to talk to your doctor about why you need this.

What happens before surgery?

You will come to the Pre-Admission Assessment Unit 1 to 2 weeks before to learn how to get ready for surgery. Here you will meet with a nurse and an anesthetist.

In this clinic, you will have blood taken for any tests your surgeon has ordered. You will also have a heart test done called an ECG. You will meet with the anesthetist to talk about having general anesthesia for this surgery. This means that you sleep during surgery.



In the Pre-Admission Assessment Unit you will get a set of instructions to follow before surgery. If you are not sure of anything, contact your surgeon's office for advice.

What happens the day of surgery?

You will check in at the Reception Desk of the Day Surgery Unit about 2 hours before surgery. You will wait in the waiting room until you are called in. If you have a friend or family member with you, you go into the Day Surgery Unit by yourself at first. As soon as you are ready for surgery, the nurse will invite your support person to join you.

Before surgery, the surgeon will also come to see you and mark the surgical area with a special pen. The anesthetist or anesthetist's assistant will also come and talk to you before surgery,

A nurse will put a small tube in a vein in your arm called an intravenous or IV. This tube is used to give you fluid and medication.



The Operation

Operating Room

When it is time, you will be taken to the Operating Room. This room is bright and cool. You will move from your stretcher bed onto the operating room table with help.

The team then goes through the steps of preparing for surgery called a “surgical time out.” They make sure they have the right patient and the right surgery before starting your anesthesia.



How long does the operation take?

This will depend on what your doctor is doing. Ask your doctor how long you will be in the operating room.

What happens after surgery?

You will go to the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) There is a waiting room close to this area in the main lobby for your support person to wait.

Nurses will watch you closely as you wake up. You will feel pain or discomfort. You may have nausea or vomiting. You will be given medication to help. You will also get antibiotic medication to prevent infection.

Your blood pressure, heart rate and breathing will be monitored. You will have the oxygen in your blood checked by a small pad on your finger called an oximeter. As you recover, you may be given oxygen.

You will then go to a nursing unit for after care. Some people go back to the Day Surgery Unit, some go to the Chest Unit and some people go to the Intensive Care Unit. This depends on the procedure you had.

On the unit you will be watched closely. You will have your blood pressure, pulse and breathing monitored. You will also have the oximeter pad on your finger. The nurses will listen to your chest regularly.

Incision Care

The nurses will check your incisions and dressings regularly. You will learn how to check your incision and look after it to get ready to go home.

Pain Control

You will have pain control medication regularly. Your nurses and doctors will monitor how well the pain medication is helping. It is important to report your pain.

You may have a pain control pump after surgery. This will give you pain medication safely when you need it. You should give yourself pain medication before moving around and doing your exercises. Your nurses and doctors will monitor how well the pain pump is helping.

Chest Tube

Most people have a chest tube. This is connected to a drainage unit by the bed. The nurses check and measure the drainage that collects in the container. The chest tube comes out when there is a very small amount of drainage in 24 hours. Your doctor decides when it is removed.

Exercise and Activity

You will begin to do your deep breathing and coughing exercises as soon as you wake up. The nurses will remind you to do this regularly. Deep breathing and coughing helps prevent many problems after surgery.

You will also be encouraged to move often and do exercises to get your blood moving around. This helps prevent blood clots. The nurses will help you move around and teach you how to move with the tubes.

Chest X-ray

You will have a chest X-ray after surgery and every day you have a chest tube in. Your doctor decides if you will have one. The X-ray may be done on the unit with a portable machine or you may go to the Diagnostic Imaging Department for this.

Care at Home

You will go home after your chest tube comes out. Most people look after their own care at home and do not need any additional help. Here are some guidelines to follow at home:

Exercises

Keep doing your deep breathing and coughing exercises and any other exercises you were taught. Exercise such as walking is important to help your breathing and circulation. You should talk to your doctor about any other activity or exercise you may want to do.

Hygiene

You may shower the day after the chest tube is removed. Cover the incision with waterproof bandages. For daily care you may need to cover the incisions with bandages in the beginning and then nothing as the skin heals.

Pain Control

You may need to use pain medication by mouth at home. Some people need it before doing exercises or at bedtime. You should need less pain medication each day as you recover.

Sutures

Sutures are removed in 5 to 14 days by your family doctor or surgeon. Make sure you have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon.

Contact your doctor if you have:

- a temperature of 38.3°C or 101°F or higher
- an incision that is getting redder, has opened or has discharge
- pain that gets worse
- trouble breathing

