

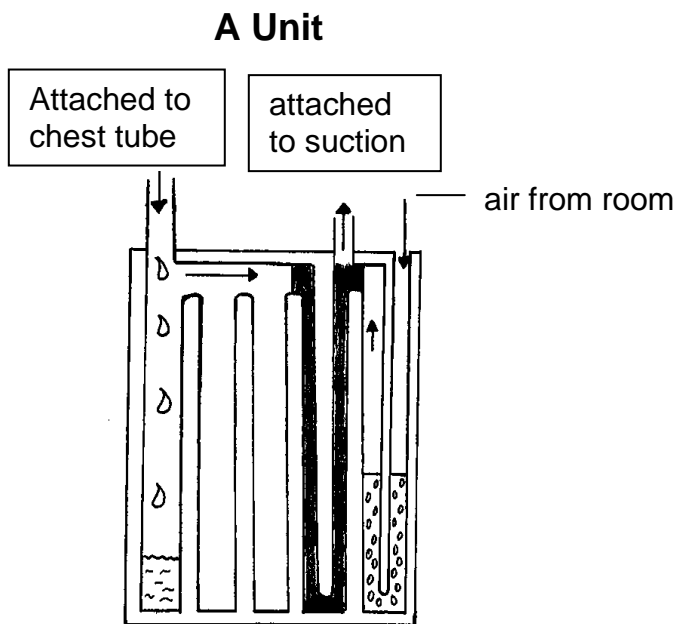
Chest Tubes

What is a chest tube?

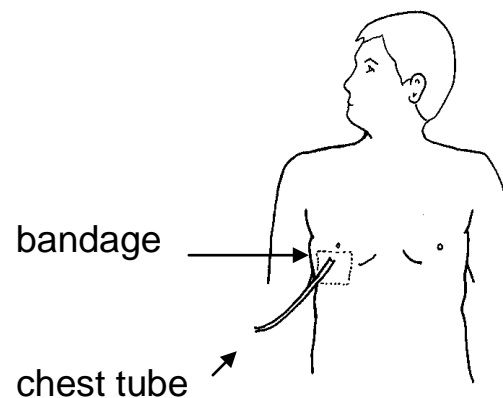
A chest tube is a plastic tube placed into the space between the chest wall and the lung. This is called the pleural space. The chest tube drains the air and fluid from this space around the lung.

How does a chest tube work?

The chest tube is attached to a special unit with a one-way valve known as an underwater seal. This makes sure that no air goes back into the pleural space. Some tubes are also attached to suction to help drain fluid or air. This is a picture of what your unit may look like. There are many types of units so your unit may not look the same as others or this picture.



A chest tube coming out of a chest



When is a chest tube put in?

A chest tube is often put in during surgery. You may return from surgery with one or more chest tubes.

A chest tube may also be put in by your doctor in your room with the help of a nurse. If this is done, you are given freezing in your skin before a small opening is made in your chest. The tube is put into this opening. You may feel some discomfort at this time. The tube is held in place by a stitch and a bandage.

How long will I have a chest tube?

Chest tubes stay in for about 2 to 4 days most of the time. Each person is different. Your nurse checks the amount and colour of drainage. The nurse also looks for bubbles that mean there is an air leak. A chest x-ray will be done every day you have a chest tube or when your doctor orders one.

Your doctor decides when to remove the chest tube. The decision is based on the amount of drainage and whether there is an air leak or not. A chest x-ray will also be done after your chest tube is removed if your doctor orders one.

Can I move around with a chest tube?

You can move around in bed, walk in your room and use the washroom with a chest tube. The tubes are long enough to allow drainage containers to be taken along. You need permission from your doctor, physiotherapist or nurse to walk in the halls without suction.

How should I sleep?

Your doctor or nurse will tell you which side to sleep on. It is important that you follow these instructions to help your recovery.

How do I wash myself?

Your nurse or your care helper will help you wash at the bedside or sink. You will be encouraged to do as much as you can for yourself to help you recover faster.

How do I look after my incision?

Your nurse will check the skin around the chest tube each day. If you see redness or drainage, tell your nurse. You will have a light bandage on the incision after the tube is removed.