
What is a chest tube?

A chest tube is:

- A sterile, hollow tube placed into the chest in the space around the lung.
- Used to drain air, blood or fluid trapped around the lungs.

Why does my child need a chest tube?

Your child may have had heart surgery, a chest injury or an infection in the lungs. These things can cause the lungs to collapse because of:

- **Pneumothorax** – air trapped in the space around the lung
- **Pleural effusion** – fluid that has collected in the space around the lung
- **Hemothorax** – blood trapped in the space around the lung

A chest tube drains the air or fluid and helps the lung to re-expand. Your child can then breathe easier and feel more comfortable.

How do you place a chest tube?

A doctor:

- Places the chest tube in the operating room or in the treatment room of your child's care area.
- May use a numbing medicine and will also clean the skin.
- Makes a small incision (cut) in the skin between the ribs and then puts the tube through it.
- Attaches the tube to the skin with stitches.
- Connects the chest tube to a special collection system that stays below the level of the lungs. Most often, the system stays on the floor by the bed or hangs on the bed.
- Attaches the collection system to suction to help the fluid drain. Your child's nurse will check the chest tube and collection system often.

Your child's doctor will:

- Order a chest X-ray, as needed, to check your child's lungs. Your child may need an X-ray each day.
- Decide when the chest tube can be removed

What should I do to help my child?

Talk with your child's doctor and nurse about the chest tube. Let your child know the tube will help them breathe easier and can also help them get better.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Chest tubes, continued

Follow these safety tips when caring for your child:

- Never move the collection system.
- Ask the nurse for help when you move your child.
- Do not clamp or kink the tube.

When should I call the nurse?

Call your child's nurse **right away** if:

- Your child has pain.
- You see any changes in how your child looks or feels.
- The tube comes apart from the collection system.
- The tubing gets bent or twisted.
- You see signs of breathing problems, such as:
 - Fast, shallow breathing
 - Trouble breathing
 - Chest retractions (skin pulling in around ribs and chest when breathing)
 - Grunting when your child breathes
 - A blue or dark purple color to the nails, lips or gums
 - Wheezing
 - A baby cannot breathe and suck at the same time

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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