

FACTSHEET

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Physiotherapy for children after heart surgery

Children who have had heart surgery often require chest physiotherapy to help prevent and reduce lung complications.

Why?

The anaesthetic and the operation itself may result in the lungs making more secretions than usual. After the surgery, your child will also be less active than normal. These factors may make it more difficult for your child to take deep breaths and cough effectively to clear their secretions.

After surgery

A physiotherapist will assess your child after their operation. Whether they are still on the breathing machine (ventilator) or breathing by themselves, the physiotherapist will be checking that the lungs are clear of secretions. The physiotherapist may use different techniques to help clear the secretions depending on the age of your child. These may include positioning, chest percussion, deep breathing exercises, coughing and a gradual return to walking. Suction may be used to remove the extra secretions from the lungs if they are unable to cough well enough.

A physiotherapist will continue to see your child until physiotherapy is no longer needed. This is usually three to five days but will vary depending on how your child's lungs were before the operation, the type of operation that your child has had and how your child progresses after the operation.

It is often very helpful for your child's recovery if you can encourage your child to do some of the physiotherapy techniques when the physiotherapist is not there. Your physiotherapist will advise you on what to do.

If physiotherapy is still required when it is time for you to go home, the physiotherapist will teach you how to do the techniques before you go.

Remember:

- Chest physiotherapy is an important part of recovery following surgery.
- You can help by encouraging your child to do the exercises and breathing activities.
- If you have any questions please ask the physiotherapist looking after your child.