



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Chest drain

Accident and emergency

Patient information

What is a chest drain?

A chest drain is a flexible tube placed between your lung and chest wall. This space is called the pleural space and is lined by a thin layer called the pleura.

This procedure is usually carried out to remove unwanted air, fluid or pus that has collected in the pleural space

These problems can make breathing difficult and stop your lungs from working properly. The chest drain helps air or fluid leave your body, allowing your lung to re-expand and function normally.

Will it hurt?

Before the procedure, we inject local anaesthetic into your skin to numb the area. This may sting briefly. You may feel some pressure or pulling as the drain goes in, but we will give you pain relief to keep you comfortable.

How is a chest drain inserted?

You will either:

- Sit with your head and arms resting on a pillow, or
- Lie on a bed with one arm raised above your head.

We will:

1. Perform an ultrasound scan to choose the safest site.
2. Clean the skin to prevent infection.
3. Inject local anaesthetic to numb the area.
4. Make a small cut and gently insert the chest drain.

The drain is stitched in place and covered with a dressing. It connects to a bottle of water, which stops air or fluid from going back into your chest.

If needed, we may connect the drain to a gentle suction machine to help your lung re-expand.

How do I look after my drain?

As the drain removes air or fluid, you should start to feel more comfortable and breathe easier. Read the following tips to help prevent problems:

You can walk around but you must remember to carry the drainage bottle with you.

- Always carry the bottle below the level of your waist.
This helps stop any fluid collected going back into your lungs
- Do not leave the ward without telling your nurse.
- Avoid pulling or tangling the tube.
- If using suction, you will need to stay near your bed.
- Keep the drainage bottle on the floor when lying down.

Be aware

Tell your nurse if:

- You feel pain.
- The tube looks like it has moved or come loose.
- You feel more short of breath.

How is the chest drain removed?

The drain usually stays in place for a few hours to a few days, depending on your progress. We may monitor you with chest X-rays to see how well the lung is healing.

Removing the drain is a simple procedure. The dressings are taken off and the drain is gently pulled out. This may feel uncomfortable for a few seconds. If you feel sore afterwards, you can take simple painkillers.

Tell your nurse right away if you have:

- Severe pain
- Difficulty breathing
- A high temperature

Are there risks involved?

Chest drains are generally safe. Most people feel better after the procedure. However, some risks include:

- **Discomfort.** Pain relief is available if needed.
- **Displacement.** Sometimes the tube falls out and needs to be replaced. We use stitches and firm dressings to prevent this.
- **Infection.** Rare (about 2% of cases, or 2 people out of every 100). If the area becomes red, painful, or you feel feverish, please let us know.
- **Bleeding.** Serious bleeding is rare (also about 2% of cases).

General support

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the NHS 111 service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

- The NHS website provides online health information and guidance
- NHS 111 phone line offers medical help and advice from trained advisers supported by nurses and paramedics. Available 24 hours a day. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones
- There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, in Crawley and at Lewes Victoria Hospital
- Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can be contacted with your comments and concerns, and to provide general support.

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This information is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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