

Chest Drain Insertion

What is this procedure?

A chest drain is a plastic tube that is inserted into the chest to drain fluid or air.

Why is there a need to do it?

Air or fluid has collected in the pleural space, which may stop your lung from working normally. The chest drain will allow this air or fluid to leave the body so that the lung can re-expand to its normal shape, helping you breathe more easily. If required, the fluid can be sent away for tests.

How is it done?

Patient will be asked to sit or lie in a comfortable position. The chest drain will be inserted into the side of your chest below the armpit, or sometimes in front of your chest or on your back.

Before inserting the drain we will usually do an ultrasound scan of the chest.

Skin will be cleaned with antiseptic to reduce the risk of infection. Local anaesthetic may be injected to numb the area. A small cut will be made in the skin and the drain will then be guided into the chest.

The drain will be secured in place with stitches, covered by a dressing and connected to a chest drain bottle. The chest drain will be monitored regularly by your healthcare team to ensure it is working normally.

When can the tube be removed?

The time will vary depending on patient's clinical condition.

Risk and Complications

- Pain
- Infection
- Subcutaneous emphysema: air may leak around the wound into area under the skin, leading to swelling due to air collection and may require re-positioning and additional chest drain
- Malposition
- Kinking
- Blockage
- Dislodgement
- Bleeding, rarely massive bleeding requiring surgical intervention and can be life-threatening

- Rarely injury to adjacent organs which can be life-threatening and require surgical intervention
- Death

Possibility that the procedure cannot be carried out

Rarely difficulties may be encountered resulting in failed chest drain insertion. Other treatment options may be needed. Let your doctor explain to you in this situation.

Other treatment options

If the patient chooses not to perform this procedure, it may affect the overall condition. The change of the condition is affected by a variety of clinical factors, including the individual patient's physical condition before the onset of illness, the type of disease, the response to treatment and the progress, etc. Your doctor will explain other suitable options to you.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this booklet is for general reference only. The risks and complications listed above are not exhaustive. Please consult your attending doctor for details.