Going home with a Heimlich valve
For patients of St. Joseph’s Health Centre

What is a Heimlich valve?
A Heimlich valve is a small device that is attached to your chest tube. This will allow air to drain out of your chest tube until your lung heals. You can go home with it.

How to stay safe after going home
You must have an adult with you for the next 24 hours. You should not be alone in case you need help or have an emergency.

Wound care

- Always wash your hands before and after touching your bandage or wound.
- Keep the bandage clean and dry that is covering the chest tube.
- Do not disconnect the Heimlich valve from the chest tube to try to clean it or remove fluid. It is okay to have some fluid in the tubing as long as it isn’t causing problems. Get help if you have trouble breathing or have air collecting under your skin near the chest tube.
- Keep the plastic container connected to the lower end of the Heimlich valve at all times. Do not block the open vent on the plastic container. The nurse will show you how to empty this container.
- Do not put lotions, powders or any ointment on the skin around your chest tube site.
Activity

- Do not put the Heimlich valve directly into water.
- Do not soak in a bathtub or hot tub while you have a chest tube.
- Do not go swimming while you have a chest tube.
- You can shower 48 hours (2 days) after surgery. Use a waterproof covering to keep the chest tube dry. Cover the chest tube bandage, chest tube and Heimlich valve with plastic wrap and tape all of the edges to your skin. Do not let the water spray directly on the chest tube. Pat dry after showering. Remove the plastic wrap covering. Change the gauze bandage if it gets wet.

What should I do?

If the Heimlich valve becomes disconnected from the chest tube:

- Reconnect the blue end of the valve to your chest tube right away, tape it securely then call your doctor. Make sure you don’t connect the wrong end, as this can cause you harm.
- If you cannot reconnect the valve to the chest tube, go to your nearest Emergency department.

If the chest tube falls out:

- Tape gauze tightly to the skin where the chest tube was.
- If you have no trouble breathing, go to the Emergency department immediately for a chest X-ray.
- If you have trouble breathing, call 911.

Contact your doctor if:

- Your chest tube starts to drain a lot of fluid.
- You have increased pain and tenderness not relieved by pain medicine.
- You have chills or a fever with a temperature over 38 degrees Celsius.
- The skin around your wound is very red, swollen or warm.
• You have green or yellow foul-smelling fluid leaking from your wound.

• You feel air crackling under your skin when you touch the area near your chest tube.

If you cannot reach your doctor, go to your nearest Emergency department.

**Go to Emergency or call 911 if:**

• You are having trouble breathing.

• You have a sudden onset of sharp chest pain with shortness of breath.

**My follow-up appointment**

Date: ___________________________ Time: _________________

You will receive instructions to return for another chest X-ray to assess if the chest tube can be removed.

**Check that you understand**

To make sure these instructions are clear, tell your health care provider:

• When you should go to the Emergency Department

• How you will care for your wound site

**My notes**

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This information does not replace the advice you receive from your health care provider. If you have questions, ask your health care team.