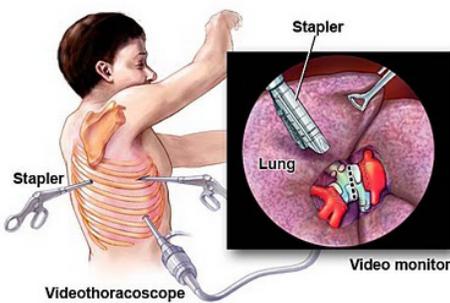


# Thoracotomy



## What is a Thoracotomy?

Thoracotomy is the process of making of an incision (cut) into the chest wall in order to access the chest cavity. This allows the condition of the lungs to be studied. Thoracotomy may include removal of a lung, lymph nodes, part of a lung and /or removal of a rib. The surgery may also include examination, treatment, or removal of any other organs in the chest cavity.

## What will the surgery tell me?

The results following thoracotomy depend on the reasons why it was performed. A thoracotomy can provide a specific diagnosis if tissue is removed, evaluate the extent of disease, play a role in treatment and indicate if further treatment is necessary.

## Who will perform the surgery? And where will the surgery be done?

A thoracic surgeon (a surgeon who specializes in procedures involving the chest) will perform your thoracotomy. Your surgical procedure will be performed at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre.

## How do I prepare for the surgery?

Make sure that you tell your doctor about any allergies you have and what drugs, vitamins, herbs, and other supplements you are taking. This includes drugs and supplements bought without a prescription. If you are a smoker, you should stop smoking several weeks before your surgery.

## During the week before your surgery:

- You may be asked to stop taking drugs that make it hard for your blood to clot. Some of these are aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), or ticlopidine (Ticlid).
- Ask your doctor which drugs you should still take on the day of your surgery.
- Prepare your home for your return from the hospital.

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## On the day of your surgery:

- Your doctor or nurse will give you specific instructions when you arrive at the hospital.
- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your surgery.
- Take the medications your doctor prescribed with small sips of water.

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## Will the surgery be painful?

You will receive general anesthesia before surgery. You will be asleep and unable to feel pain.

After your surgery, the incision site and your general chest area may be painful for several weeks to months.

Your doctor will prescribe pain medication for you.

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## What will happen during the surgery?

Surgery may take from 2 to 4 hours.

Before surgery begins, you will be given general anesthesia through an IV (a tube that goes into your veins). Your surgeon will make a surgical cut between two ribs. These ribs will be separated. The incision may range from just under 5 in (12.7 cm) to 10 in (25 cm). Your lung on this side will be deflated so that air will not move in and out of it during surgery. After surgery, one or more tubes will be placed into your chest area to drain out fluids that build up. These tubes are called chest tubes. After the surgery, your surgeon will close the ribs, muscles, and skin with sutures.

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## What will happen after the surgery?

A hospital stay is required after a thoracotomy surgery usually for 3-7 days. Often an ICU stay is also required for a short period of time after the surgical procedure.

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## During your hospital stay, you will:

- Be asked to sit on the side of the bed and walk as soon as possible after surgery
- Be asked to do a lot of deep breathing and deep breathing exercises to help prevent pneumonia and infection
- Have tube(s) coming out of the side of your chest to drain fluids
- Receive medication to prevent blood clots
- Receive pain medicine through an IV (a tube that goes into your veins) or by mouth with pills

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## When will I know the results of the surgery?

Your doctor will discuss the results with you following the surgery. A pathology report will be sent to your doctor after the surgery and the results will be discussed with you at your next visit.

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## Seek IMMEDIATE medical attention if:

- Your incision is red, swollen, hot to the touch
- You notice discharge from your incision
- You experience a fever above 38.5°C
- You experience extreme shortness of breath

