Having your lungs working at their best before and after surgery can reduce your chance for lung infections. You may be at risk for lung infections when you have surgery due to having anesthesia and lying flat for a length of time. If you have an incision on your chest, back, or stomach, you may not breathe as deeply and mucus can build up in your lungs.

To protect and strengthen your lungs before surgery:

- Stay active. Exercise helps to strengthen your breathing.
- If you smoke, stop. Smoke is harmful to your lungs and needs to be avoided to reduce your risk for infection.

After your surgery, you also need to protect your lungs:

- Get up and move as soon as the doctor allows after surgery.
- Cough and deep breathe at least _______times every ____ hour(s).
- Take 2 slow, deep breaths in through your nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth. Take in a third slow, deep breath through your nose and then cough as you breathe out. Your nurse will show you how to do this. Do this for at least a week after your surgery, or until you are fully recovered.
- Support your incision with a blanket or pillow when you cough and deep breathe. This will ease the discomfort.
- Your doctor may want you to use an incentive spirometer to exercise your lungs. Your nurse will instruct you on how to use it.
- Drink at least 8 cups of fluid each day, unless your doctor has told you to limit your fluids. This will help keep your lungs clear.
- Ask for and take your pain medicine as needed to stay comfortable. You will be better able to take deep breaths and move around.
- Avoid people with coughs, colds and other infections while you recover.

After you return home, call your doctor if you have:

- fever greater than 100° F
- trouble breathing
- increase in mucus, coughing, or wheezing
- stuffy nose, sneezing, or sore throat for more than 48 hours