

# Postural Drainage



Physiotherapy

**Name of Patient:** .....

**Date:**.....

**Name of Physiotherapist:** .....

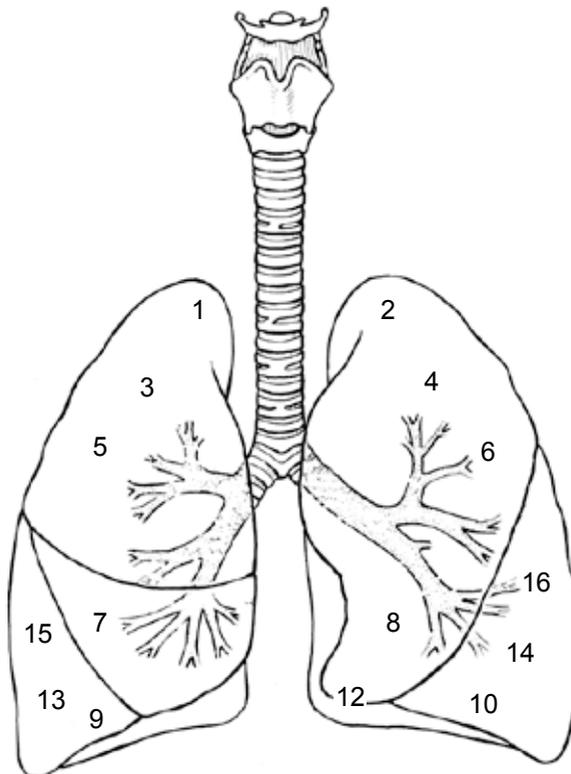
This booklet aims to explain Postural Drainage and can be used as a reminder of how to perform it at home.

## What is postural drainage?

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Sputum is the thick mucus secreted by the walls of the airways. Having certain respiratory conditions or a chest infection can cause you to produce more and thicker sputum. Postural drainage involves adopting certain positions to aid the removal of sputum from your lungs. These positions use gravity to drain sputum from your lungs, making it easier to clear.

Your lungs are made up of lots of different airways, a bit like the branches of a tree. This is known as the “bronchial tree”. These branches are divided into different sections arranged at various angles (see diagram below).



## How does postural drainage work?

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Sputum can easily collect in any segment of the lungs. By lying or sitting in a certain position you can use the effect of gravity to clear this sputum. In order to drain sputum from a certain segment, you should adopt a position that places the branch leading to this segment in a vertical position (see photographs below).

## What are the benefits?

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Removing sputum reduces the risk of it becoming infected by bacteria. Infected sputum (a chest infection) can lead to further damage to your lungs. Removing sputum can also make your breathing feel more comfortable.

## What are the risks?

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The Physiotherapist will only advise Postural Drainage if it is suitable for you. Things to consider before performing Postural Drainage:

- Wait at least one hour after eating to reduce the risk of indigestion.
- Avoid head down positions if you suffer from reflux.
- Move slowly between positions, especially head down positions, to reduce the risk of dizziness caused by low blood pressure.

## Are there any alternatives?

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The Active Cycle of Breathing Techniques (ACBT) can help to clear sputum (see separate leaflet entitled How To Clear Your Chest). ACBT and Postural Drainage can be used together. These techniques can be combined with moderate, daily exercise that gets you breathing harder, such as brisk walking or swimming.

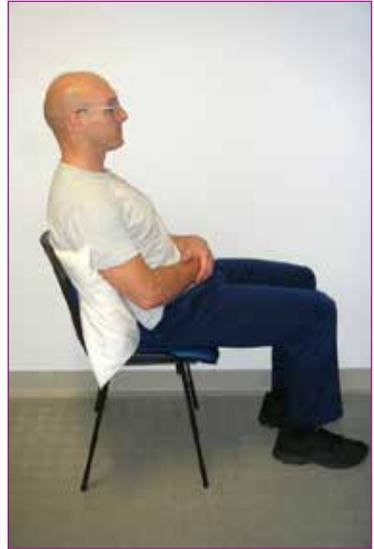
## Which positions should I use?

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Your Physiotherapist will advise you which positions are most appropriate for you to use – this will depend on where the sputum tends to collect in your lungs. Please use the positions \_\_\_\_\_ ticked times a day, spending \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in each position.

**Segments 1 and 2 (right and left upper lobes – at the top)**

Sit in a relaxed position in a chair. Your hips should be towards the front of the seat and your shoulders resting against the back of the chair.



**Segments 3 and 4 (right and left upper lobes – at the back)**

Sit on a chair, leaning forwards onto a pillow resting on a table.



**Segments 5 and 6 (right and left upper lobes – at the front)**

Lie flat on a bed with a pillow for comfort under your head.



**Segment 7 (right middle lobe)**

Lie on your left side, hips and legs up on pillows with your knees bent. Your upper body should be rotated a quarter-turn backwards. For comfort, place a pillow between your knees.



**Segment 8 (left middle lobe)**

Lie on your right side, hips and legs up on pillows with your knees bent. Your upper body should be rotated a quarter-turn backwards. For comfort, place a pillow between your knees.



**Segment 9 (right lower lobe – at the front)**

Lie on your left side, hips and legs up on pillows with your knees bent. For comfort, place a pillow between your knees.



**Segment 10 (left lower lobe - at the front)**

Lie on your right side, hips and legs up on pillows with your knees bent. For comfort, place a pillow between your knees.



**Segments 11 and 12 (right and left lower lobes - at the back)**

Lie on your front with your hips and legs supported with pillows. Your ankles should be slightly higher than your hips.



**Segments 13 (right lower lobe - at the side)**

Lie on your left side, with your hips and legs elevated on pillows. Your upper body should be rotated a quarter-turn forwards.



**Segments 14 (left lower lobe - at the side)**

Lie on your right side, with your hips and legs elevated on pillows. Your upper body should be rotated a quarter-turn forwards.



**Segments 15 and 16 (right and left lower lobes - at the top)**

Lie on your front with a pillow underneath your hips. Your hips should be higher than your ankles and shoulders.



**Further Instructions:**

## References

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- Hough A (2001)  
**Physiotherapy in Respiratory Care: an evidence- based approach to respiratory and cardiac management.** Third edition. Cheltenham. Nelson Thornes.
- Pryor J A and Prasad S A (2008)  
**Physiotherapy for Respiratory and Cardiac Problems: Adults and Paediatrics. Fourth Edition.** London. Churchill Livingstone Elsevier.





## Contact details

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**For further information, please do not hesitate to contact:**

### Physiotherapy Services

Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Egerton Road, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XX

**01483 464153**

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Royal Surrey County Hospital (RSCH) NHS Foundation Trust fully subscribes to the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) *Being Open* best practice framework, November 2010.

### PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located in far left corner as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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