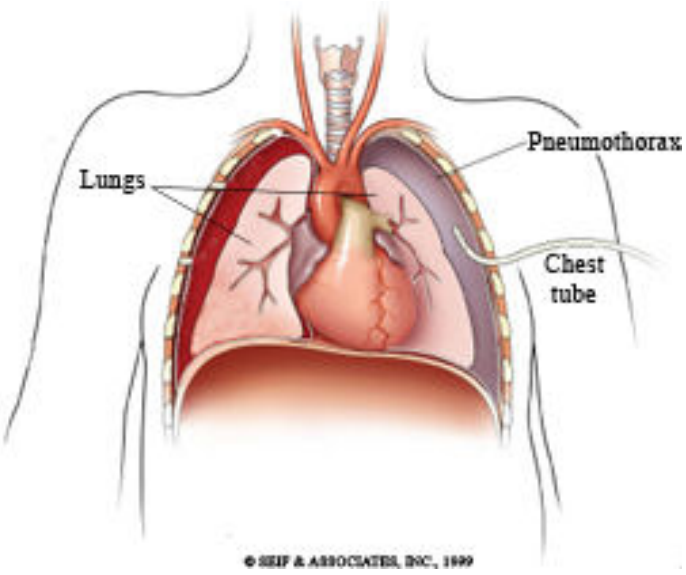
Pneumothorax (Collapsed Lung)

A *pneumothorax* is a collapsed lung. This is a condition that usually occurs suddenly. It happens when air begins leaking from a lung and begins to build up between the lung and the *pleura* (the thin lining around the lung on the inside of the rib cage). When this is small, there may be minimal pain, difficulty breathing, or other problems. Sometimes it can be followed without being admitted to the hospital. When it is larger, it may require hospitalization. A tube (called a chest tube) may need to be inserted into the air space. It will remove the air between the lung and the rib cage. This immediately expands the lung back to normal size and makes breathing easier. A chest tube is usually in for 1 to 7 days, although it may be longer.



CAUSES

- It may happen spontaneously with no apparent reason.
- It may happen because of previous lung disease or problems. Examples of this include:
  - Asthma.
  - Emphysema.
- Injury
  - Rib fractures.
  - Blunt (from a car accident or a fall).
  - Sharp (from a knife or gunshot wound).

SYMPTOMS

This condition may be associated with:

- Cough.
- Chest pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Increased rate of breathing.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Smoking is a common aggravating factor. STOP SMOKING.
- If a cough or pain makes it difficult to sleep at night, try sleeping in a semi-upright position in a recliner or using 2 or 3 pillows may help.
- Rest as you feel it is needed. Your body will help guide you in this.
- If you had a chest tube and it was removed, ask your provider when it is okay to remove the dressing.
- Do not fly in an airplane or scuba dive after being treated for a pneumothorax until your provider says it is okay.

If you have been sent home with a diagnosis of pneumothorax, it is small and your caregiver believes it will get better without further treatment. However, your condition can change over time. You must monitor your condition carefully. If you have a significant change in how you feel, carefully follow the instructions below.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increasing shortness of breath.
- You cannot control your cough with suppressants and are losing sleep.

- You begin coughing up blood.
- You develop pain which is getting worse or is uncontrolled with medications.
- An oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop pus-like sputum.
- Any of the symptoms which brought you initially in for care are getting worse rather than better or are not controlled with medications.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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