Bronchial Hygiene

Keeping your lungs clear

Lifespan Cardiovascular Institute
Rhode Island Hospital • The Miriam Hospital
Newport Hospital

Delivering health with care®

Center For Cardiac Fitness
Pulmonary Rehab Program
The Miriam Hospital
Basic Anatomy
Airway clearance

• Your airways or breathing tubes have a natural defense mechanism
  – A thin layer of mucus
  – Small hairs called cilia

The mucus layer and cilia work together to help sweep irritants out of your lungs
Who typically has problems with too much mucus?

• Increased mucus can clog up your airways making it harder to breathe

• Trapped mucus also promotes infection

• Typically people with COPD, asthma, Cystic Fibrosis, and bronchiectasis tend to have more trouble with mucus
What is “Normal”?  Amount

• A healthy person without lung disease would still produce a small amount of mucus in their airways, but wouldn’t really be aware of any mucus

• A half-dollar sized amount of mucus would generally be considered a large amount
Amount:

• What is your baseline amount of Mucus?

• Try to be as objective as you can-ie:

  “a dime-sized amount usually in the morning”
  versus
  “A little bit once in a while”
Color

• Mucus should generally be clear-whitish in color
• If the color is darkening—you may be developing an infection (yellow, green, brown)

• Again-know what color your mucus usually is at baseline so that you know when there is a change
Color

• Irritated airways can bleed a little-especially if you are coughing frequently

• This may lead to some red or brownish streaks in your mucus.

• Call for help immediately if you are coughing a large amount of blood
Consistency

- Mucus is made up mostly of water. It should be thin and easily coughed up.

- Thicker mucus is harder to cough out and can get so thick that it can form a plug.

- Know what your mucus is like at baseline (when you feel well)!
How can you get rid of extra mucus?

• Make sure that you are drinking enough water. If you are dehydrated-your mucus will be thicker
• Talk to your doctor about medications that may help ie: mucinex
• Avoid allergens and irritants
• Postural drainage
• Breathing techniques
• Devices
  – Flutter valves
  – Percussion vests
Possible symptoms of lung infection

- Darker, thicker, more frequent mucus
- Fatigue
- Increased SOB, cough or wheeze
- Fever
- Loss of energy
- Weight loss
The Bottom Line:

- Know what is “normal” for you
  - Color
  - Amount
  - Consistency

- Get plenty of fluids

- Monitor your other symptoms
  - Fatigue, Shortness of breath, fever

- Call your doctor if there are any changes—don’t wait until the problem is severe!
Techniques to help clear the lungs

• Stacked breathing:
  – Take a small breath in – don’t exhale
  – Take another small breath in – don’t exhale
  – Take a third breath in an hold for 3-5 seconds (if you can)
  – Exhale all of the air out
Active Cycle of Breathing

- Do some diaphragmatic (belly) breathing for a few minutes
- Take in a deeper breath of air and hold for 3 seconds. Repeat 4 times
- Go back to light diaphragmatic breathing
- Repeat the deeper breaths with the hold
- Try to cough out the mucous using a “Huff”

- To Huff – blow out the air keeping your mouth open in a small “O” shape
  - Blow out the air like you are trying to fog up a window or mirror
  - Or-pretend that you have a ping pong ball in your mouth and you are trying to shoot it across the room