Pericardial Window

This information is for patients who did not have open heart surgery.

**What is the pericardium?**
The pericardium is a sac that surrounds the heart. It holds just enough fluid to pad and lubricate the heart muscle. Disease, infection, or injury can cause fluid to build up in this sac. The pressure from this extra fluid can make it hard for the heart to pump as it should.

**What is a pericardial effusion?**
A pericardial effusion is an abnormal amount of fluid between the heart and the heart sac. This abnormal fluid may be caused by, a viral infection, cancer, renal disease, heart failure, hypothyroidism, and after cardiac surgery. A pericardial window is used to make a diagnosis and to make the heart work better.

**What is a pericardial window?**
A pericardial window can be made with a small cut below the end of the breastbone (sternum) or with a small cut between the ribs on the left side of the chest. A cut is made in the heart sac to drain fluid that has built up around the heart. A tube may be placed to drain extra fluid for a short time after surgery. This helps the heart pump better again.

**What are the reasons for a pericardial window?**
- Fluid build-up around the heart.
- Allows us to see areas that may need to be tested or biopsied. Biopsies, or tissue samples, may be needed when some lung tumors occur. Lung tumors may be benign (non-threatening) or malignant (cancerous).

**What should I expect?**
An intravenous line (IV) will be placed in your arm to give you medicines during the procedure and after. This surgery is performed under general anesthesia.

Pain will be controlled with medicine by mouth or IV medicines.

You will be asked to walk around the unit several times a day.

After you go home:
- No lifting 10 pounds for 2 weeks (incision is made below the rib cage)
- No driving for 2 weeks and while taking narcotics to control pain.
- Incision: wash with soap and water daily. Pat dry. Do not apply lotions, powders or ointments.

**When to Call the Doctor**
- Signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased redness, warmth, or swelling at the incision sites
  - Increased drainage
  - Increased pain not relieved by pain medicine
  - Fever
  - Cough
- Sudden onset of sharp chest pain
- Onset of shortness of breath or worsening of shortness of breath
- Feeling a rapid heart beat
- Fainting or near fainting
- A large amount of bleeding from an incision or elsewhere in your body
- Weight gain of more than 2 pounds in 1 day or 5 pounds in 7 days
Phone Numbers
Cardiothoracic Surgery Clinic:
608-263-1530

If you live out of the area, please call:
1-800-323-8942.

Weekends, holidays, and after 4:30 pm during the week, the clinic phone is answered by the hospital paging operator. Ask for the cardiac surgery resident on call. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.