Diaphragm Injury

What is a diaphragm?
Your diaphragm is a thin, flat muscle that lies between your abdomen (stomach, liver, intestines, etc.) and your chest (heart, lungs). This muscle helps your lungs to fill with air.

What is a diaphragm injury?
Your diaphragm may be injured by a stab or gunshot wound or a blunt injury such as a fall or motor vehicle crash. Because your diaphragm lies between your chest and abdomen, an injury to your diaphragm can affect many systems in your body. Your heart, lungs, and stomach can all be affected. Diaphragmatic injury is often accompanied by rib fractures, pulmonary contusion, pneumothorax (air in between the lung and lung wall), and hemothorax (blood in between the lung and lung wall).

What are the signs and symptoms?
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Pain in the chest, diaphragm, or abdominal area
- You may also have bloating and have nausea and/or vomiting

How is it Diagnosed?
Diagnosing a diaphragm injury can be very hard. Sometimes, other injuries may hide that there is a diaphragm injury present. Specific tests may be done to view the diaphragm. These may include:
- Chest x-ray
- CT scan
- Ultrasound
- Exploratory abdominal surgery

How is it treated?
The main treatment is surgery. An injured diaphragm can affect your breathing and heart function. Based on your injury a chest tube may be placed. This tube drains fluid and blood from your chest, helping to make it easier for you to breathe. Before surgery you may have a nasogastric (NG) tube placed. The nasogastric tube (NG) goes in through your nose and down into your stomach and helps get rid of any gas or liquid that may be in your stomach.
What are the complications?
Complications include infection and pneumonia and paralysis of the diaphragm muscles. Paralysis of the diaphragm muscle would make it more difficult to take a deep breath. You will be carefully checked for any changes in pain, temperature, and breathing.

What will my hospital stay be like?
You will receive pain medicine on an as needed basis. Please let your nurse know if you are having pain. Coughing and deep breathing are very important to prevent pneumonia and to help your lungs heal. You will be expected to use your incentive spirometer and to cough & deep breathe. Blood tests will be done daily.

What should I do if I have problems when I leave the hospital?
Patients can contact the Trauma Clinic at (608) 263-7502

After hours, nights, weekends, and holidays, this will give you the paging operator. Ask for the resident on call for your clinic. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, please call 1-800-323-8942 and ask for your clinic.