Home Care of the Heimlich Valve

I. The Heimlich valve (flutter valve) is a one-way valve that allows air to flow out of the chest through the chest tube when you breathe out (exhale), but prevents air from entering the chest when you breathe in (inhale). If air were to enter the chest, your lung would collapse. The valve is connected to a chest tube on one side and is either open to the air, attached to drainage bag or allowed to drain into a wash cloth or hand towel (secured in place with a rubber band).

II. Care:
   a. Never clamp the chest tube or remove the valve unless instructed to do so by the surgeon.
   b. Keep the chest tube to valve connection firm, either by periodically pressing/pushing them together or tape.
   c. Pulsation of the valve leaflets or “honking” is normal.
   d. You should see passage of air or fluid through the valve.
   e. If chest fluid runs onto your clothes, rubber band a hand towel or wash cloth around the open end of the valve. Change this cloth when wet as needed, or at least daily.
   f. Do NOT seal the valve end with any blocking material (such as cellophane or surgical glove). Air will not be able to escape and your lung will collapse.
   g. You may take showers but not immerse yourself or valve in water (baths or swimming pools).

III. When to call your surgeon:
   a. If the valve stops fluttering or becomes “clogged”, the air leak has stopped and the chest tube can be removed in the clinic.
   b. If you have sudden or severe shortness of breath (call 911 too).

If you have any questions or problems, please call us: 503-215-2300.