

## Pectus Exercises

### Background

Children with pectus excavatum/carinatum often have a posture which makes the chest appear worse. The typical pectus posture includes forward sloping shoulders and a belly that sticks out. A mild pectus may appear to be severe simply because the posture is so poor.

### Purpose

The purpose of the exercise program is to get the child to straighten the backs and pull the shoulders back and develop a “military” posture.

### Technique

The exercise program needs the cooperation of both the child and the parent. The best way to motivate the child to do the exercises may be to have the child stand in front of a mirror to show how improving the posture improves the look of the chest.

### Exercise #1 – Back Straightening Exercise

Hands are placed behind the head and fingers interlocked. The elbows are pulled back as much as possible and the head and neck needs to remain straight. This posture causes the chest to fill out in front. The child then bends from the hips forward and down. This position is held for two to three seconds. It is very important that during the exercise the elbows, head and neck remain straight. The child should do this exercise 25 times each day. This exercise will straighten the back and pull the shoulders back.

### Exercise #2 – Strengthening the Chest Muscles

The child, if able, should do 25 push-ups each day. Another exercise to strengthen the chest muscles is to lie on his/her back on the floor with arms extended out from the body. Place small weights in each hand and keeping arms straight, bring them together over the chest. The child should do this exercise 25 times each day.

### Exercise #3 – Chest Expansion

The child breathes in as deeply as he/she can, pulling shoulders back while taking in a breath. The child should then hold his/her breath for as long as possible. This exercise should be done while keeping the back as straight as possible. The child should do this 20 times, twice each day.



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Total exercise time should be no more than ten minutes per session. The child should do these exercises immediately upon getting out of bed in the morning, and before going to bed in the evening. During the day, the child should be active. Motivation is extremely important and it is important that the child be monitored on a regular basis or he/she may lose interest. Taking an interest in the child's activities not only motivates the child but also builds good communication.

An exercise program like this will not cure a severe pectus excavatum. However, it can help poor posture, which may make even a good surgical result look bad.