POST-OPERATIVE ATELECTASIS

Atelectasis is a condition that occurs when your lung or a part of your lung gets deflated. This results in the reduction or absence of proper gas exchange in the body. There are various factors that could cause the lung to collapse. Almost everyone who has been through a surgery in which anesthesia was used has experienced some form of atelectasis. This is commonly known as post-operative atelectasis, and it constitutes around 90% of all surgical pulmonary complications. The lung tissue collapses due to the anesthetic medication. Post-operative atelectasis usually occurs within 48 hours after the surgery is completed and presents with a low-grade fever.

While anyone can experience postoperative atelectasis after going through a surgery, there are certain factors that increase its risks such as longer surgeries, obesity, smoking cigarettes, muscular weakness, prior history of respiratory infections or illnesses like asthma or being elderly. Some of the signs and symptoms that may be present include shallow breathing or other breathing difficulties, low-grade fever, increase in heart rate, chest pain or coughing, but not a prominent cough.

The treatment for post-operative atelectasis usually involves physiotherapy. Your doctor will advise you to practice deep breathing. A medical device known as an incentive spirometer may also be included in your deep breathing exercises to improve the functioning of your lungs. At the same time, you may also be asked to cough at regular intervals.

There is no definite way to prevent atelectasis after a surgery, but there are a few ways in which its risks can be reduced. Patients who stop smoking around 6 to 8 weeks before their surgery are less likely to develop post-operative atelectasis. Moving around as much as possible, walking, changing positions or sitting up in bed every few hours and practicing the recommended deep breathing exercises suggested by the doctor soon after a surgery will also improve the functioning of the lungs. It is very important to be proactive in treating atelectasis because untreated it can lead to pneumonia.