Thoracoscopy

Thoracoscopy is also called video-assisted surgery, or VATS. It’s often used to repair a collapsed lung. It’s also used to examine, biopsy, and stage a mass in the lung. Or, it may be needed to drain fluid from around the lungs. During this surgery, your surgeon can look into your chest. He or she will then perform procedures through small incisions in the chest wall. Sometimes, a thoracoscopy can’t be used for the whole surgery. In this case, a thoracotomy (open procedure) may be needed.

Preparing for Your Surgery

- Ask any questions you have about the procedure.
- Have blood tests or other tests that your doctor orders.
- If you smoke, stop right away.
- Tell your doctor about any medications you’re taking. This includes aspirin. Ask if you should stop any of them. Mention any vitamins, herbs, or other supplements you take.
- Don’t eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your surgery, or as directed.
- Arrive at the hospital on time the day of your surgery.

The Surgical Procedure

- The anesthesiologist gives you general anesthesia. This lets you sleep and keeps you free from pain during surgery. Once you’re asleep, you’ll be moved to lie on your side.
- Several small incisions are made in your side.
- The surgeon inserts a thin, tubelike device through one of the incisions. It contains a tiny camera. This camera allows the surgeon to view your lungs on a video monitor. Surgical tools are inserted through the other incisions.
- When the procedure is done, one or more tubes may be temporarily placed in the chest. These drain fluid and air. The incisions are then closed with sutures or staples.

Risks and Complications

- Wound infection
- Air leak through the lung wall, requiring a longer hospital stay
- Bleeding
- Pain or numbness at the incision site
- Inflammation of the lungs (pneumonia)