

Postoperative Instructions for Surgery

You just had an abdominal surgery. This is surgery done through an incision in your belly. It may take a few weeks or longer to heal from the surgery. This sheet gives instructions on how to care for yourself once you are at home.

Medications

Take all medications on schedule and as directed by your doctor. You may be prescribed pain medication. Do not wait until your pain becomes severe before taking the medication. It may not work as well if you wait too long to take it between doses.

Diet

Follow any diet instructions given by your doctor. You may eat solid foods, and you can eat what seems appetizing to you. You should also make sure to have plenty of fruits and vegetables in your diet.

If you have constipation, your doctor may tell you to add more fiber to your diet. You may also be told to use a laxative or stool softener. These can often be bought over the counter. Drink plenty of fluids.

Activity

Rest as often as needed.

You may shower normally. Avoid baths for at least 2 weeks. Have someone nearby in case you need help.

Ask your family and friends to help with chores and errands.

Don't mow the lawn, vacuum, or do any strenuous activities for 4-6 weeks.

Avoid lifting anything over 10 pounds, repetitive bending/stooping over for 4-6 weeks.

Avoid driving until 1 week or until you are comfortable with a seat belt and twisting your belly without pain. Make sure you are also off all opioid medications during the day.

Walk as often as you can. Staying active is important.

Nothing in the vagina until you are cleared by your doctor. This means no sex, douching, tampons.

Do the coughing and breathing exercises you were taught in the hospital. If you were given an incentive spirometer to help with breathing, use it as directed.

Ask your doctor when you can return to work.

Incision Care

Keep your incision clean and dry. It's okay to wash the skin around your incision with mild soap and water.

Don't sit in a bathtub, pool, or hot tub until your incision is closed and any drains are removed.

When coughing or sneezing, hold a pillow firmly against your incision with both hands. This is called "splinting." Doing this helps protect your incision.

Avoid picking, scratching, or pulling at your incision.

Don't use oils, lotions, or creams on your incision.

When going from lying to sitting or standing, roll to your side and use your arms to help sit you up. Get up slowly.

Follow-Up

You will have one or more follow-up visits with your doctor. These are needed to check how well you're healing.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

Fever of 100.4°F or higher

Chest pain or trouble breathing

Pain or tenderness in the leg

Increased pain, redness, swelling, bleeding, or foul-smelling drainage at the incision site;
incision separates or comes apart

Problems with the drain if you have one

Pain or hardness in your abdomen that gets worse or isn't relieved by pain medication

Nausea and vomiting that won't go away

Diarrhea that lasts more than 3 days

Constipation or inability to pass gas for more than 3 days

Dark-colored or bloody urine

Bright red or dark black stools

Itchy, swollen skin; skin rash