

How to Care for Yourself After Surgery

Patient & Family Information

This pamphlet will give you guidelines to care for yourself after surgery. Please ask us any questions you may have.

Incision (wound or cut):

It is normal for your incision to be a little red and swollen. The skin around your incision should be:

- warm to touch (not hot), and the same colour as the skin around it
- if you have sutures, they will dissolve on their own (unless you are told otherwise)
- if you have tapes, you can remove them in a week by pulling the tape ends gently towards the incision
- if you go home with staples or drains, they will be removed at a clinic visit.

Pain:

- You can expect to have moderate pain when you have surgery. Pain is greatest for the first 48 hours after the surgery. Take medication your doctor has ordered.
- It is also common to have muscle soreness after a general anaesthetic. As you move around, this will slowly go away.

Diet:

It is common to have an upset stomach after surgery. If this continues at home, your pharmacist can suggest what medication to take.

Fluids:

Try to drink 8-10 glasses a day

Foods:

Eat foods high in protein (cheese, meat, eggs, milk) and vitamin C (oranges, leafy vegetables). These will help your body to heal.

Constipation and gas:

- it is common to have gas that causes stomach pains.
- eat foods with fibre (bran, wholegrain breads, fruits and vegetables)
- walk around to help you pass gas
- if you are taking pain medications, many cause constipation
- fluids and fibre help to prevent constipation
- your pharmacist can suggest medications to help

Showering:

- you may shower the day after your surgery, unless told otherwise
- let the water run over the incision/drain (DO NOT RUB)
- gently pat the area dry
- Avoid soaking in the tub, hot tubs, swimming pools, or whirlpools until your doctor tells you that you can.

Medication:

Your doctor will tell you if you need any medications. If you need antibiotics, be sure to take all of them as ordered until they are all gone.

Activity:

You may return to normal activities as you are able.

Here are some guidelines to help you recover after your surgery:

- to help keep your lungs clear, breathe deeply ever 2 hours when you are awake for a few days after your surgery
- do leg exercises (tighten your thigh muscles, point your toes, pull your toes towards your knees), to avoid a blood clot in your leg
- go for short walks 3 times a day, do not overdo it and walk farther as you feel better
- rest when you are tired, but do not stay in bed

If you have an abdominal incision:

- do not lift anything over 10 pounds
- (ie. child, brief case, groceries, no vacuuming, no shovelling) for 6 weeks (or as your doctor suggests)
- do not do demanding exercises (aerobics, squash) for 6 weeks, or until your doctor says you can

Work:

Your doctor will say when you can go back to work/school. It depends on what you do, and the kind of surgery you had.

Please make a follow-up appointment to see your doctor**Phone your doctor or go to the Emergency Department where you had surgery if:**

- You have a large amount of bright red bleeding from your incision.
- Your medicine is not helping your pain.
- Your incision feels hot, looks red and swollen.
- Your incision drainage has a foul smell.
- You develop fever or chills.
- You have redness, firmness, tenderness, swelling or heat in the calf of your leg.

Guidelines to Follow After Having a General Anaesthetic:

The medications given to you during surgery may remain in your body for as long as 48 hours. They may alter how you think and do things. Because of this, for 48 hours do not:

- drive for
- drink any alcohol
- decide on any legal or money matters for

You are a partner with us in planning your care. Ask questions, and be sure you are clear about how you will manage when you go home.

For general information or if you have any questions and you cannot contact your doctor, please phone:

**HEALTHLink Alberta
1-800-408-5465 (LINK)
Health advice 24 hours a day**