

GOING HOME AFTER SURGERY

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When you leave hospital you will be given a summary of your stay; this has information about your problem, the treatment you received and any follow-up to the treatment. Your GP also receives a copy but if you need to visit your GP, take your copy along in case the GP does not have it to hand. If you become unwell following discharge from hospital, consult your GP. Some patients are advised to go to their GP for their follow-up check or you may be asked to attend outpatients' clinic appointment. This appointment will be sent to you in the mail. The appointment lets the doctor check your progress, give you any further test results and allows you to ask any remaining.

Rest

Many people are surprised at the time it takes to get over an operation even if it was fairly minor. It is common to feel tired, uncomfortable and vulnerable when you first go home. You might find that you are not able to do all the things you would like to do because of this. Don't worry as this is quite normal. It helps to plan a rest time during the day. Let your family and friends know that this is your recovery time so that you do not get disturbed.

Pain Relief

With good pain relief you will be able to move more comfortably and doing things like walking, coughing and showering will be easier. You should sleep and feel better and have less chance of developing complications. Things that you can do to improve pain relief are:

- Relaxation (by listening to music or watching TV)

- Aromatherapy
- Meditation
- Reading
- Walking
- Deep breathing exercises

Medication such as Panadol, taken regularly, is very effective as pain relief. If you find that you are cannot manage your pain with these methods, consult your GP.

Looking after your wound

All wounds go through several stages of healing and you will be able to see changes in your wound. People often feel:

- Tingling, numbness and itching sensations
- A firm lump under the scar as new tissue form
- Slight pulling around the stitches or clips as the wound heals.

It is safe to get your wound wet in the bath or the shower [unless otherwise advised]. There is no evidence to show that adding salt to the bath aids healing and it may make your skin feel dry and uncomfortable. If your wound becomes more painful, red or swollen, or starts to discharge then consult your GP; these are signs of wound infection. If you have clips, staples or stitches in your wound when you go home, you will need to go to your GP to have them removed. Clips and staples are usually removed 10 days after operation and stitches after 7 days. Any stitches that you cannot see because they are under the skin will be dissolvable stitches and take some months to dissolve.

Activity

It is important to gradually increase the amount of exercise you take. You may decide to take a short walk two or three times a day and increase the distance over a few weeks. Many people find it easier to sit in a high chair as it can be difficult getting up from a low chair, especially if you have had abdominal surgery. Movements that cause discomfort are bending or stretching, lifting heavy weights [including small children] and pulling and pushing [like vacuuming or lawn mowing]. If you have an abdominal wound you should avoid heavy lifting for a period of 6 weeks to avoid the formation of a hernia. Standing for long periods can also be tiring. Avoid these until you feel able to do them. If help is available for the first one or two weeks after discharge it is wise to accept it.

Your Bowels

Changes in diet, activity and the use of some drugs can lead to irregular bowel habits but this usually rights itself with time. If you have had surgery on your bowel it would be wise to ask your doctor or nurse how your bowel might react now and what to expect in the future. Straining can be uncomfortable and for some people unwise, particularly after abdominal surgery. A well balanced diet and regular exercise are advised. You may also be prescribed medication to regulate your bowel. It is important that you understand the reasons for this medication before you leave hospital.

Sexual Activity

There is no set rule about the time at which you can resume your usual sexual relations. You may find that you have less interest in sex while you are still recovering from your surgery. This is natural and will improve as you get stronger and fitter. Generally, gentle sex can be resumed as soon as it is comfortable, perhaps around the time you are ready to go back

to work, or within two to three weeks after discharge. If you experience pain or discomfort you would be wise to wait a little longer.

Driving

The time you can safely start driving varies a great deal with the type of operation you have had. Ask for specific advice, but remember that your strength and reflexes must be up to coping with an emergency stop as well as normal driving. Consult with your Insurance Co. If you still have some discomfort from surgery then let someone else drive as your ability to react quickly is likely to be compromised.

Back to Work

When you are able to return to work depends upon both the type of operation that you have had and the type of work that you do. It is better to feel well before you return to work or you may be affected by tiredness and poor concentration. Ask your doctor before leaving hospital about when you might be fit for work. You will be given a work certificate if needed. If you have financial concerns related to your hospital stay you can ask to see a Social Worker.

Questions:

List here any questions that you want to ask: