

Discharge Instructions for Abdominal Surgery (General)

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Abdominal surgery is performed through one or more incisions in your belly. It may take a few weeks or longer to heal from the procedure.

Medicines

- **Pain Medicine:** Do not wait until your pain becomes severe before taking your medicine. It may not work as well if you wait too long between doses.
- **Stool Softeners:** Most surgeons prescribe stool softeners along with opioid prescriptions. Take these as directed.
- **Antibiotics:** If you are prescribed antibiotics to treat or prevent infection, be sure to take the entire course even if you start to feel better.

Diet

- Follow any specific diet instructions provided by your healthcare provider, such as starting with liquids and slowly adding solid foods.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- If you experience constipation, your provider may suggest adding more fiber to your diet or using over-the-counter laxatives or stool softeners.

Activity

- **Rest and Walking:** Rest as often as needed, but start walking as early as the day of surgery and walk often.
- **Breathing Exercises:** Perform the coughing and breathing exercises you were taught in the hospital. If you were given an incentive spirometer, use it as directed to help prevent lung infections.
- **Physical Restrictions:** * Do not lift anything over 10 pounds for 4 to 6 weeks.
 - Avoid strenuous activities, such as mowing the lawn or vacuuming, for 4 to 6 weeks.
 - Avoid driving until your healthcare provider says it is okay.
- **Assistance:** Have someone nearby in case you need help, and ask family or friends to assist with chores and errands.
- **Returning to Normal:** Ask your provider when you can shower, bathe, or return to work.

Incision and Drain Care

- **Hygiene:** Keep your incision clean and dry. You may wash the skin around the incision with mild soap and water.
- **Dressings:** Change your dressing as instructed, or if it becomes wet or dirty. In most cases, dressings can be removed after 48 hours.
- **Splinting:** When coughing or sneezing, hold a pillow firmly against your incision with both hands to protect the area and decrease discomfort.

- **Drains:** If you have a drain, record the amount of drainage and clean the tubing daily as directed. Check with your provider before getting the drain wet.
- **Avoidance:**
 - Don't sit in a bathtub, pool, or hot tub until the incision is closed and drains are removed.
 - Avoid picking, scratching, or pulling at the incision.
 - Do not use oils or creams on the incision; ask your provider before using any lotions.

Follow-up

You will have one or more follow-up visits to check your healing progress. Stitches, staples, or drains may be removed during these visits.

When to Call the Healthcare Provider

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

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) 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.
- The incision separates or comes apart.
- Problems with your drain.
- Belly pain or hardness that worsens or is not relieved by medicine.
- Persistent nausea and vomiting.
- Diarrhea, 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 or a skin rash.