



Guidelines After General Surgery

Activity

- Moving your body after surgery helps your body heal, prevents complications, and can help you get your strength back.
- Walk regularly, and as early as possible on the day of your surgery.
 - › If you are short of breath or dizzy, take a break. Try again, more slowly, with some help if needed.
- **Do not lift more than 10 pounds**, or as directed, until you see your surgeon.
- **Do not drive if you are taking pain medication**, or if you are in pain. Pain can make your reaction time slower. Talk to your surgeon about this.
- You can have sex when you feel comfortable enough. You may need to use different positions to not bother your incision (cut).
- With all activity it is important to listen to your body. Slow down or do less if you are uncomfortable or in any pain.

Hygiene (showering/bathing)

- **Unless your surgeon tells you not to**, you may shower 48 hours (2 days) after your surgery, or once your dressing is removed. Lightly dab your incision (cut) dry — **do not rub**.
- Wait 7 to 10 days before having a bath, or as instructed by your surgeon.

Deep Breathing and Coughing

- Cough and deep breathe a few times every hour you are awake. This keeps your lungs clear and helps you recover from your surgery.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold for a couple of seconds. Breathe out through your mouth and cough. When you cough, hold a pillow or folded blanket tightly against your incision to support it and lessen any pain.
- Use an incentive spirometer (a small device you breathe into to help your lungs recover after surgery), if you were given one.

Pain

- Pain after surgery is common. Good pain control is important to your recovery.
- Tylenol® (acetaminophen) or Advil® (ibuprofen) are often enough to control your pain.
- If prescribed, use pain medications as directed to keep your pain under control.
 - › If pain makes activity hard, try using pain medications 20 minutes before you start.
- Shoulder pain can be common after laparoscopic surgery.
- Spending time with family, listening to music, or watching a favorite show can distract you from pain.
- **Do not** drink alcohol while taking pain pills.
- **Do not** take more than you are prescribed or directed.

Store medications in a secure place. Return any leftover pills to a pharmacy for proper disposal. This is especially important for prescription pain medications as misuse can be dangerous to you and your family.

Nutrition

- It may take time for your appetite to get back to normal. Try eating smaller meals and snacks more often.
- Eating well-balanced, healthy meals will help you regain your strength.
- Always follow your surgeon's or dietitian's instructions about what to eat and drink, and how to go to the bathroom.

What should I do if I am constipated (not able to poop) after surgery?

Some prescription medications can make you constipated.

- Gradually increase foods higher in fiber such as whole grain breads and cereals, vegetables, fresh fruit, dried peas, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid a day (like water, milk, juice, or decaffeinated tea or coffee).
- Ask your primary care provider or pharmacist about using stool softeners or laxatives (medications to help you poop), if needed.

**Remember, you do not need to poop every day to be healthy.
If your surgeon gives you different instructions, follow those instead.**

Wound Care

- You may remove your dressing after 48 hours (2 days), unless your surgeon tells you to wait longer.
- Do not get your dressing wet.
- If you have bleeding, sit or lie down and put firm pressure on the area for 20 minutes. If bleeding does not stop, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.
- Sutures or staples can be removed after 10 to 14 days by your primary health care provider or at a clinic.
- If you have Steri-Strips™ (pieces of strong tape), leave them in place for 7 to 10 days. You may get the Steri-Strips™ wet. Pat your incision dry after showering — **do not rub**.

WHEN TO GET HELP

If at any time you are concerned, contact your surgeon or call 811. If it is an emergency, call 911, or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you have any of the following:

- **Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting (throwing up)** that do not go away.
- **Fever** (temperature above 38° C/100.4° F) that is not controlled with Tylenol® and lasts more than 48 hours
- **Signs of a blood clot** in your leg(s): redness, swelling, warmth, or pain in either leg. You have a higher risk of forming a blood clot after major abdominal (stomach area) surgery.
- **Diarrhea** (watery poop) that lasts for more than 24 hours, or is getting worse. Some surgeries, such as gallbladder surgery, can cause diarrhea at first.
- **Signs of a urinary tract infection (UTI):**
 - › If you had a tube placed in your bladder during surgery and you have any pressure, pain or burning while peeing, trouble peeing, or fever, and these symptoms continue longer than 48 hours.
- **Possible wound/incision (cut) problems:**
 - › If redness, swelling or warmth around your incision are increasing, especially if you have fever as well. Some redness around your incision is a normal part of the healing process.
 - › If you see green or yellowish drainage (pus), or separation of your incision. Some clear drainage can be expected.



My surgeon:

Dr.

Their office number is:

902-

For more helpful information, visit www.nshealth.ca/NSQIP

Aussi disponible en français : *Directives –
Après une chirurgie générale* (FF85-2224)