

# Planning for Your Hospital Stay After Surgery

Halifax Infirmary (HI),  
Victoria General (VG),  
Dartmouth General  
Hospital (DGH)

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:  
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

*Prepared by:* Same Day Surgery Units (HI, VG and DGH sites)  
*Designed by:* Nova Scotia Health Library Services

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# Planning for Your Hospital Stay After Surgery: HI, VG, DGH

## Learning about the time of your surgery

### Halifax Infirmary and Victoria General:

- The day before your surgery, we will call you between noon and 2 p.m. to confirm the time of your surgery. If your surgery is on a Monday, we will call you on Friday.
- If you are not going to be home, you must call us to confirm the time.
- If we have not called you by 2 p.m., please call the hospital (site where your surgery is scheduled) between 2 and 3:30 p.m.
  - › Halifax Infirmary: 902-473-3187
  - › Victoria General: 902-473-6629

### Dartmouth General Hospital:

You will get your surgery date and time at your Pre-Assessment Clinic appointment. If your surgery date changes, your surgeon's office will call you.

## Discharge from the hospital

Plan to have a responsible adult with you on your way home from the hospital and for 24 hours after you are discharged.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

### Notes:

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- You may be constipated (cannot poop).

Constipation can be caused by:

- › some pain medications.
- › dehydration (not having enough liquids or fluids).
- › immobility (not moving around enough).
- If you need it, your health care team may give you a medication called a laxative (medication to help you poop), or stool softener to help with constipation.

## **Instructions for your surgery and care at home**

- Before you are discharged from the hospital, your health care team will give you information about the type of surgery you had and give you instructions for when you go home.
- If you have any questions about your surgery or how to take care of yourself at home, ask your health care team before you are discharged.

## **Visitors**

Please ask your nurse about the rules for having visitors on your unit.

## **One week before surgery:**

You may need to stop taking some of your medications before your surgery. Follow the instructions you were given in the Perioperative Anesthesia Clinic (Pre-admission Clinic) about taking your medications.

## **The night before surgery:**

- Take a bath or shower the evening before or the morning of your surgery. Wash all parts of your body, including your hair.
- **Do not** use scented products. Nova Scotia Health is scent-free.
- You will be given instructions about skin preparation, if needed.
- **Do not smoke or vape after your evening meal on the night before your surgery.**
  - › Smoking and vaping can increase the secretions (fluid) in your lungs. This could cause breathing problems after surgery.
  - › **Nova Scotia Health is smoke-free.** Ask a member of your health care team about the Smoking Cessation Program.

### **Dentures and oral appliances**

- You may wear your dentures, retainers, or Invisalign® trays to the hospital.
- Just before you go to the OR, a member of the health care team will ask you to take them out. You will be asked to put them in a cup labelled with your name.

### **Glasses and contact lenses**

- Bring a case to keep your glasses in when you are not using them.
- **Do not wear contact lenses.** If you **must** wear contact lenses, bring your lens container and cleaning solutions.
- Tell your nurse that you are wearing contact lenses. **They must be removed before you go to the OR.**

### **Hearing aids**

If you wear a hearing aid, bring it to the hospital with a container to keep it in.

### **Nutrition**

- You may have an IV to help you get enough fluids.
- When you are ready, your health care team will help you go back to your usual eating and drinking.

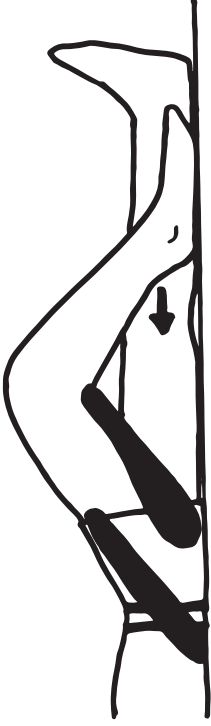
### **Passing urine**

- After your surgery, your nurse will ask you to pass urine (pee).
- If you have pain when you pee or it is hard to do, you may get a catheter (a thin tube) put in to empty your bladder.
- A nurse will remove the catheter when you can pee without it.

### **Bowel movements**

- You may move your bowels (poop) more, less, or at a different time of day than you did before your surgery.
- Your poop may be harder, softer, or more or less watery than before your surgery.

- Slide one heel towards your bum. Keep your heel and buttocks on the bed. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat with the other leg.



### Activity after surgery

- It is important to be as active as possible. Too little activity can make your recovery take longer.
- The amount of activity you will be able to do will depend on your type of surgery.
- Your health care team will encourage you to get out of bed.
- Someone will help you out of bed the first couple of times, and then as needed.
- You will have some pain when you are starting to be active after surgery. Talk with your health care team if your pain is stopping you from being active.

### Personal care items

Please bring these items to the hospital:

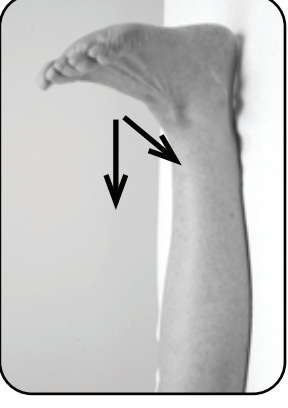
- Pyjamas or loose-fitting clothing (like a sweat suit or lounge-wear) and comfortable, supportive shoes with enclosed heels. Shoes with rubber soles and laces are best.
  - Housecoat (bathrobe)
  - Underwear and socks
  - Bras
  - Slippers with a rubber sole
  - Toothbrush
  - Toothpaste
  - Mouthwash
  - Comb or hair brush
  - Soap (unscented)
  - Shampoo (unscented)
  - Eyeglasses/contact lenses and a case
  - Dentures/denture cleaner/fixing agents, if you have them
  - Moisturizer
  - Shaver
  - Deodorant (unscented)
- Other items can be brought to the hospital as they are needed. If you can, leave these items with a loved one(s) or a support person(s) to bring to your room after surgery.

## Valuables

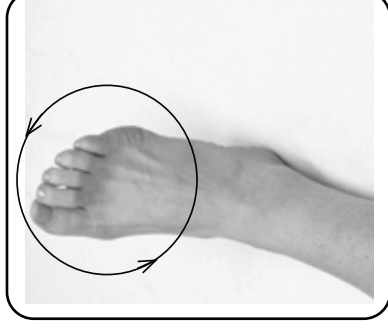
- Leave all valuables (like jewelry, cash, debit and credit cards, cheque books) at home.
- **All jewelry, including toe rings, must be taken off at home.**
- **All body piercings (like your nose, belly button, tongue, or ear) must be taken out at home.**
  - › **Tell a member of your health care team** if you do not want to or are not able to remove any piercing.
- The hospital is not responsible for the loss of any item.

## To do the exercises:

- Point your toes downward towards the floor, relax your foot, and then point your toes upward to the ceiling, then relax.



- Make circles with both ankles going to the right. Repeat the same going to the left. Relax.



This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

- Do these exercises at least 5 times every hour that you are awake until you are able to move and walk around in the hallway.

### Feet and leg exercises

- Exercising your feet and legs helps your blood flow better.
- **Do not** lay in bed for a long time without moving your legs and feet. Your health care team will encourage you to get out of bed. Not moving for a long time can slow your recovery and may cause complications (like blood clots).
- These exercises should be done at least 5 times every hour. Your nurse can give you more help or information if needed.
- **Do not do these exercises if your surgeon says not to.**

### The day of surgery:

#### Please bring these things to the hospital:

- All of your medications in their original containers (including drops, puffers/inhalers, patches, injections, creams/ointments, over-the-counter [including herbal supplements and vitamins] and prescription medications)
  - Provincial health card
  - Private insurance card (if you have one)
  - Personal Directive (if you have one). See the pamphlet, *Advance Care Planning - Making Your Personal and Medical Wishes Known* for more information:
    - › [www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1942.pdf](http://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/1942.pdf)
- CPAP (if you have one)

**If you have a fever, cold, or flu-like symptoms, call your surgeon's office before coming to the hospital. Your surgery may need to be rescheduled.**

Follow the instructions you were given in the Perioperative Anesthesia Clinic (Pre-admission Clinic) about taking your medications.

## **Please come to the Same Day Surgery Unit:**

- Halifax Infirmary, 5th floor**
- **Arrive 3 hours before your scheduled surgery time** or as directed by your surgeon's office.
  - › If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., please make sure you arrive by 5:30 a.m.
- Enter the main entrance and look for a kiosk or ask at the information desk for directions.
  
- Victoria General, Victoria Building, 10th floor** (use the Dickson Building entrance if arriving before 6 a.m.)
  - › If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., please make sure you arrive by 6 a.m.
- Take the Victoria Building elevator to the 10th floor, and follow the signs to the Registration area.
  
- Dartmouth General, main level**
- **Arrive 2 hours before your scheduled surgery time** or as directed by your surgeon's office.
  - › If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., please make sure you arrive by 6:00 a.m.
- Register at the Day Surgery Unit.

## **Exercises**

### **Deep breathing and coughing exercises**

- While you are on the nursing unit, you will do the deep breathing and coughing exercises that you practiced at home:
    1. Take a deep breath in through your nose.
    2. Hold your breath for 2 to 3 seconds.
    3. Blow the air out through your mouth.
    4. Repeat breathing in and out this way for 6 or 7 times.
    5. On your last breath in, hold the breath for **1 second only** and then firmly cough.
- If you cough up any phlegm, repeat the exercise, starting at step 1.
- These exercises help keep your lungs clear and make your breathing easier.
  - The best time to do these exercises is about 20 minutes after you take your pain medication.
  - You will be given a special pillow to use for these exercises. When doing these exercises, hold the pillow over any incisions (cuts) on your chest or stomach (belly) that were made during your surgery. This will support your incisions and help with pain.



- When you are more awake and comfortable, PACU staff will take you to your room on a nursing unit.

### **Nursing unit**

- On your unit, the nurses will continue to monitor you.
- You will have a call bell so you can call a nurse if needed.

### **Pain control**

- The staff on the unit will make you as comfortable as possible. Pain medication will be available.
- **Do not** wait until you are in very bad pain before asking your nurse for pain medication. Treating your pain will help your healing.

### **Anesthetic**

- You will be given an analgesic (medication that helps control pain) before your surgery.
- Depending on the type of surgery you are having, you will be given:
  - › **general anesthetic** (medication to put you to sleep).
  - or**
  - › **regional anesthetic** (an area of your body will be frozen). **Sedation** (medication to help you relax) is usually given through an intravenous (IV) tube injected into a vein in your arm, along with regional anesthesia.

## Before your anesthetic

- **Do not** eat any food, including candy, **after midnight the night before surgery.**
- You may drink **CLEAR LIQUIDS** up until **2 hours before your surgery**, unless told otherwise by your doctor. Clear liquids include:
  - › Water
  - › Pulp-free juice, like apple or cranberry juice (**no orange juice**)
  - › Sports drinks (like Gatorade® or Powerade®)
  - › Tea or coffee **without milk or cream**
- You may take your medications as told by your doctor with sips of water.
- You may brush your teeth.

**If you do not follow these instructions, your surgery will be cancelled.**

## After surgery

### Recovery area

- You will wake up in the Post-Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) to recover from your anesthetic.
- The nurses in the PACU will closely check your:
  - › IVs
  - › Dressings
  - › Drainage tubes
  - › Blood pressure
  - › Pulse
  - › Breathing
  - › Oxygen levels
- The nurses may give you oxygen through nasal prongs or a face mask if you need it.
- The nurses will check your pain levels. You may be asked to rate your pain on a scale of 0 to 10.
- The nurses may give you medication(s) to help with pain, as needed. They will keep checking on your pain to make sure you are as comfortable as possible.
- The skin around where you had your surgery may look like it has been dyed. This is normal. The dye is from a liquid that staff in the OR use to clean your skin before surgery.

**If you are having surgery at the Halifax Infirmary or Victoria General:**

- › A liaison nurse visits the waiting area several times during the day.
- › The liaison nurse will tell your loved one(s) and support person(s) about your condition and progress.
- › The liaison nurse works from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**If you are having surgery at the Dartmouth General Hospital site:**

- › We are changing how we contact loved ones. In the meantime, please ask a member of your health care team how your loved one(s) and support person(s) will be notified when you are out of surgery.

**After a general anesthetic, a regional anesthetic, or IV sedation:**

Call us if you have questions or concerns about your anesthesia care.

- If you had surgery at the **Halifax Infirmary or Victoria General Hospital:**
  - › Phone: 902-473-4326
- If you had surgery at the **Dartmouth General Hospital**, please call your surgeon's office.
  - › Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- If the office is closed, please leave a message. **If you need help right away, call 811, go to a walk-in clinic, or go to the nearest hospital.**
- You must have a responsible adult take you home (car, taxi, bus).
- You must have a responsible adult stay with you for the **first 24 hours after surgery.**

## Delays

- Delays in the Operating Room (OR) may cause a change in your scheduled surgery time.
- There is a chance your surgery could be cancelled because of an emergency. If this happens, your health care team will tell you what to do next.

## Same Day Surgery Unit

### Pre-operative (pre-op) preparation

- This is where you will get ready for the OR.
- **Food and drinks are not allowed in the pre-op room.**
- Pre-op room staff will give you a hospital gown, housecoat, and slippers to change into.
- A support person or a loved one may be able to wait with you in the pre-op area until it is time for you to go to surgery. Ask a member of your health care team if you are able to have someone stay with you while you wait for your surgery.
- The pre-op nurse will talk with you as part of your pre-op assessment. They may ask you questions that you have already answered. They need to ask these questions to meet Nova Scotia Health's patient safety standards.

## Surgery

### The Operating Room (OR)

- An OR nurse will talk with you before you go to the OR. They will ask you some questions from a surgical safety checklist.
- The air in the OR can feel cold. We will give you a warm blanket.
- OR staff will help you move to a bed.
- You will have an anesthetic intravenous (IV) in a vein in your arm, which will make you go to sleep.
- Depending on what surgery you are having, a large pad may be placed on your leg, back, or shoulder. This is called a **grounding pad**. It is used for safety.
- Your surgeon and anesthesiologist will talk with you before your surgery to answer any questions you may have.

### Updating your loved one(s) and support person(s) about your progress

- Your loved one(s) and support person(s) are an important part of your care.
- Every Nova Scotia Health hospital site has a waiting area for your loved ones and support person(s) to wait in while you are having your surgery.