

Gastrointestinal (GI) Surgery: Home Care Instructions

Diet

Return to your normal diet unless your doctor or dietitian gave you different instructions. A diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables and protein will help your body heal from surgery. Examples of high-protein foods include fish, eggs, meats, beans and nuts. Unless you are on a bowel management program, you may want to reduce gas producing foods such as milk products, carbonated drinks, beans and large portions of high-fiber foods for the first five to seven days.

Your bowel movements may take two to three weeks to return to normal. Try to drink eight, 8-ounce glasses (two quarts) of liquid a day to help keep you hydrated and your stool soft.

Activities of Daily Living

When you arrive home, do not expect to do everything you did before surgery. You will need at least two months to return to your normal activity level. Full recovery can take up to three to four months, depending on the extent of the surgery. You probably will tire easily, but mild exercise such as walking, will help. Remember to take frequent breaks throughout the day. Follow these guidelines:

- Avoid all strenuous physical activity, such as vacuuming and other heavy housework until your doctor tells you that it is okay.
- Do not lift objects heavier than 5-10 pounds (4.5 kg) for at least six weeks after surgery.
- Wear clean, loose fitting clothing over your incision.
- Walk a little more each day to help build your endurance.
- Continue your breathing and coughing exercises.
- Resume sexual activity when your doctor tells you that it is okay.

Comfort

Use a pillow or towel over the incision while wearing a seatbelt to help increase comfort and to prevent trauma to the wound. Many patients find it comfortable to use a pillow across their stomach for various activities, such as sitting up, coughing and deep breathing.

Medicines



Please refer to your “Updated Home Medication List” given to you by your health care provider. These are the only medicines your doctor wants you to take.

Take all your medicine as prescribed by your doctor. Your nurse will give you information to help you understand your prescriptions, how often to take your medicine and when to take your next dose. Please read the handouts that your nurse will give you about your prescription medicines.

Many patients receive prescription pain medicine. Follow the precautions below while taking pain medicine.

- Do not drive.
- Two side effects of these medicines are constipation and upset stomach.
- Take pain medicine with food.
- Avoid taking Tylenol[®] (acetaminophen) while you are taking pain medicine. Medicines such as Lortab[®], Vicodin[®] and Norco[®] contain Tylenol. Taking more than 4 grams of Tylenol a day is toxic to your liver.

Incision Care and Bathing

Inspect your incision every day. The area of the incision is closed with Dermabond[®] glue, staples or sutures. You may also have steri-strips, which are small pieces of tape that will fall off on their own in one to two weeks.

Cleaning the incision

Unless your doctor or nurse tells you differently, clean your incision with soap and water once a day or as needed. Gently pat dry with a clean towel. Take showers while your incision is healing. Do not take a tub bath, sit in a hot tub or go swimming until your incision is fully healed, usually six weeks or longer. Soaking your incision in water increases your risk for infection. Please ask your doctor if you have questions.

Problems and Symptoms

Call your doctor or nurse if:

- Your temperature is greater than 101° degrees F (38.3° degrees Celsius)
- You have more than three episodes of nausea or vomiting
- You have severe pain that does not get better after taking pain medicine
- You go three days without having a bowel movement
- If you feel like you may be dehydrated. Signs and symptoms of dehydration are:
 - Dizziness or lightheadedness, especially when you stand up
 - Feeling like your heart is beating fast
 - Feeling sluggish or confused
 - Severe abdominal pain
 - High fever

- Frequent vomiting and unable to drink water
- Persistent diarrhea lasting longer than two days
- Constipation or hard stools that are painful or difficult to pass

Problems with Your Incision

Call your doctor or nurse if you have any signs and symptoms of infection. These include:

- increased swelling;
- separation of the incision;
- increased redness or heat;
- a lot of drainage from the incision (some bleeding on the dressing is okay);
- Increased pain or tenderness; or
- temperature of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher.

Problems with Your Tube

Call your doctor or nurse if you have these problems with you tube:

- You cannot flush the tube.
- The site around the tube becomes red, swollen or has foul smelling drainage.
- The tube comes out. If this happens:
 - Clean the skin and tape gauze dressing over the area.
 - Immediately call your doctor or nurse and go to the nearest hospital emergency center.

Problems with Your Ostomy

Call your doctor or nurse if you have the following problems with your ostomy:

- The stoma changes from shiny, wet and red in color to dull, dark gray.
- The stoma starts to bleed heavily. **It is normal** for the stoma to bleed if it is irritated or rubbed, but the bleeding should stop in a few minutes.
- You have more than 400ml of liquid output from the stoma in an eight-hour time period and you are unable to drink enough fluids to stay hydrated (at least 300ml of fluid in an eight- hour time period) and/or if the stoma output does not thicken while you are on a bowel management program.

Follow all special instructions that your doctor gives you.

Comments
