Patient & Family Guide
2026

Planning for Your Hospital Stay After Surgery

Halifax Infirmary (H.I.), Victoria General (V.G.), Dartmouth General Hospital (D.G.H.)

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FF85-1118

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Planning for Your Hospital Stay After Surgery

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., call the hospital site where your surgery is scheduled.
- **If your surgery is at the Halifax Infirmary, please call:**
  - Phone: 902-473-3187
  - Hours: 2 to 3:30 p.m.
- **If your surgery is at the Victoria General, please call:**
  - Phone: 902-473-6629
  - Hours: noon to 1:30 p.m.

If your surgery is at Dartmouth General Hospital:

- Your surgeon's office will give you your surgery date and time.

- At your Perioperative Anesthesia Clinic appointment, the nurse will confirm your surgery date and time with you. If your surgery date changes, your surgeon's office will call you.

Before your 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 about taking your medications.

The night before surgery:

- Take a bath or a 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.
- We will give you instructions about skin preparation (getting your skin ready for surgery), if needed.
- **Do not smoke or vape after your evening meal on the night before your surgery.**
  - Smoking and vaping can increase the fluid in your lungs. This could cause breathing problems after surgery.



- **Nova Scotia Health is smoke-free.** If you would like help to stop smoking, ask a member of your health care team about the Stop Smoking Program.

Dentures and oral (mouth) appliances

- You may wear dentures, retainers, or Invisalign® trays to the hospital.
- Just before you go to the operating room (O.R.), a member of your health care team will ask you to take them out. They will ask you 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. **You must remove them before you go to the O.R.**

Hearing aids

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

Personal care items

- Please bring these items to the hospital:
  - ☐ Pyjamas or loose-fitting clothes (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 rubber soles
  - ☐ Toothbrush
  - ☐ Toothpaste
  - ☐ Mouthwash
  - ☐ Comb or hairbrush
  - ☐ Unscented soap
  - ☐ Unscented shampoo
  - ☐ Glasses or contact lenses and a case, if you have them
  - ☐ Dentures, denture cleaner, and fixing agents, if you have them
  - ☐ Moisturizer
  - ☐ Shaver
  - ☐ Unscented deodorant
  - ☐ A reusable water bottle

- Other items can be brought to the hospital as they are needed.
- If you can, leave these items with a support person to bring to your room after surgery.

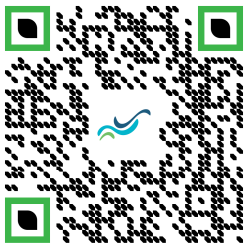
Valuables

- Leave all valuables (like jewelry, cash, debit and credit cards, cheque books) at home. The hospital is not responsible for the loss of any items.
- **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.

Day of surgery:

- **Please bring these things to the hospital:**
  - ☐ All of your medications in their original containers (including prescription and over-the-counter products, inhalers, creams, eye drops, patches, herbal products, vitamins, and supplements)
  - ☐ 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/patient-education-resources/1942

Scan the QR code below on your device (open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears)



  - ☐ CPAP (if you have one)

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

- Follow the instructions you were given in the Perioperative Anesthesia 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 told by your surgeon's office.
- If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., arrive by 5:30 a.m.
- Go in the Summer Street entrance and look for a kiosk or ask at the information desk for directions.

☐ **Victoria General**, Victoria Building, 10th floor

- If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., arrive by 5:45 a.m.
- If you are arriving before 6 a.m., use the Dickson Building entrance.
- Take the Victoria Building elevator to the 10th floor, then follow the signs to the Registration area.

☐ **Dartmouth General**, main level

- **Arrive 2 hours before your scheduled surgery time** or as told by your surgeon's office.
- If your surgery is scheduled for 7:30 a.m., arrive by 6 a.m.
- Register at the Day Surgery Unit.

Anesthetic

- You will be given an **analgesic** (medication to help 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
  - **Local anesthetic** (freezing)
    - **Sedation** (medication to help you relax) is usually given through an intravenous (I.V.) tube injected into a vein in your arm with regional anesthesia.

Before your anesthetic

- **Do not eat any food**, including candy, **after midnight the night before your 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. **Do not** have 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 a general anesthetic, a regional anesthetic, or I.V. sedation

If you have questions or concerns about your anesthesia care:

- If you had surgery at the **Halifax Infirmary** or **Victoria General**:
  - › Phone: 902-473-4326
- If you had surgery at **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 Emergency Department.**

- You must have a responsible adult take you home (by car, taxi, or bus).
- You must have a responsible adult stay with you for the **first 24 hours (1 day) after your surgery**.

Delays

- Delays in the O.R. 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 O.R.
- **You cannot have food or drinks in the pre-op room.**
- Pre-op room staff will give you a hospital gown, a housecoat, and slippers to change into.
- A support person may be able to wait with you in the pre-op room until it is time for you to go for surgery. Ask a member of your health care team if you can 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 (O.R.)

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

Updating your support persons about your progress

- Your support persons are an important part of your care.
- Every Nova Scotia Health hospital site has a waiting area for your support persons to wait in while you are having surgery.

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

- A liaison nurse will visit the waiting area several times during the day.
- They will tell your support persons about your condition and progress.
- The liaison nurse works from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.

If you are having surgery at Dartmouth General Hospital:

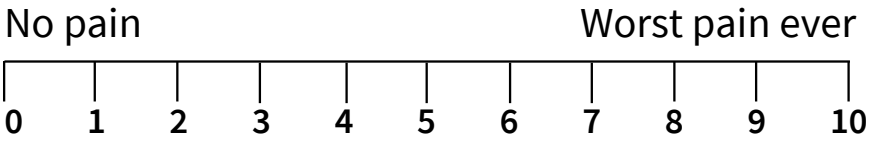
- Nursing staff from the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) or from the Day Surgery Unit will tell your support person(s) when you are out of surgery.

After surgery

Recovery area

- You will wake up in the PACU to recover from your anesthetic.
- The nurses in the PACU will closely check your:
  - I.V.s
  - Dressings
  - Drainage tubes
  - Blood pressure
  - Pulse
  - Breathing
  - Oxygen levels

- The nurses may give you oxygen through nasal (nose) prongs or a face mask, if needed.
- The nurses will check your pain level. You may be asked to rate your pain on a scale of 0 to 10.



- The nurses may give you pain medication, as needed. They will keep checking your pain level 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 O.R. staff use to clean your skin before surgery.
- 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 keep monitoring you.
- You will have a call bell so you can call a nurse, if needed.

Pain control

- Unit staff will make you as comfortable as possible. Ask your nurse for pain medication, if needed.
- **Do not** wait until your pain is very bad before asking the nurse for pain medication. Treating your pain will help your healing.

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. Breathe in and out this way 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, do the exercise again, 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.

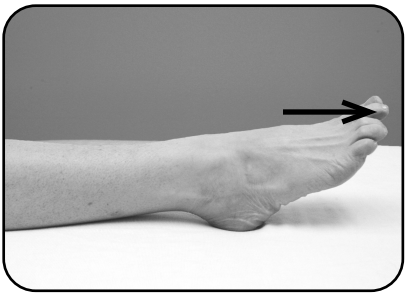
- We will give you a special pillow to use for these exercises. When doing the exercises, hold the pillow over any incisions (cuts) on your chest or stomach that were made during your surgery. This will support your incisions and help with pain.
- Do these exercises at least 5 times every hour that you are awake until you can walk around in the hallway.

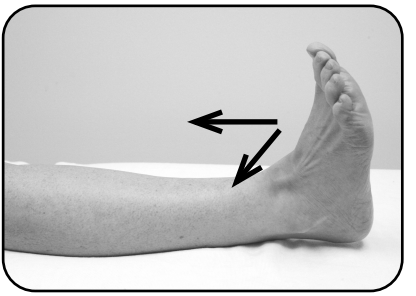
Feet and leg exercises

- Exercising your feet and legs helps your blood flow better.
- **Do not** lay in bed for a long time without moving your feet and legs. 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).
- Do these exercises at least 5 times every hour. Ask your nurse for help or more information, if needed.
- **Do not do these exercises if your surgeon says not to.**

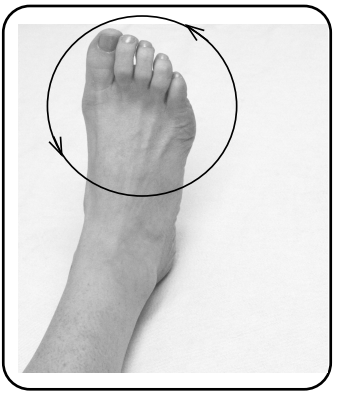
To do the exercises:

- Point your toes down towards the floor. Relax your foot, then point your toes up towards the ceiling. Then relax.

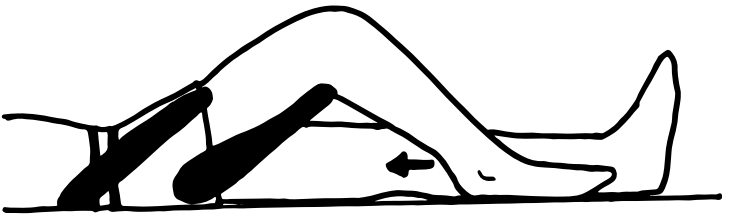




- Make circles with both ankles going to the right. Repeat the same going to the left. Relax.



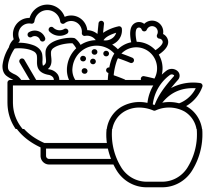
- Slide 1 heel towards your bum. Keep your heel and bum on the bed. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat with your other leg.



Activity after surgery

- **It is important to be as active as possible.** If you do not do enough activity, your recovery may 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. **Do not** get out of bed for the first time on your own. You may be dizzy from the anesthetic.
- At first, you will have some pain with activity after your surgery. Talk with your health care team if your pain is stopping you from being active.

Nutrition



- You may have an I.V. 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.

Peeing

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

Pooping

- You may 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.
- You may be constipated (cannot poop). Constipation can be caused by:
  - Pain medication
  - Dehydration (not having enough fluids)
  - Not moving enough
- Your health care team may give you a **laxative** (medication to help you poop) or a **stool softener** (medication to make your poop softer) to help with constipation, if needed.

Instructions for your 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
  - Instructions for your care at 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.

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

Notes:

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 all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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

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