

Guidelines After General Surgery

Activity

- Moving your body helps your body heal, prevents complications, and helps you get stronger.
- Walk often, and as early as you can on the day of your surgery.
 - › Take a break if you have trouble breathing or feel dizzy. Try again, more slowly. Ask someone to help you walk, 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. You may need to try different positions to not bother your incision (cut).
- Listen to your body. Slow down or do less if you are not comfortable or have any pain.



Hygiene (showering or bathing)

- Unless your surgeon tells you not to, you may shower 48 hours (2 days) after your surgery, or once your dressing is removed.
- **Do not** get your dressing wet.
- Pat your incision dry. **Do not** rub.

Deep breathing and coughing

- Breathe deeply and cough a few times every hour you are awake. This keeps your lungs clear and helps your recovery.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold for a couple of seconds. Breathe out through your nose and cough. When you cough, hold a pillow or a folded blanket tightly against your incision. This will support your incision and lessen any pain.
- Use an incentive spirometer (a small device you breathe into to help your lungs recover after surgery), if you have 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 your loved ones, listening to music, or watching a favourite TV show can help to distract you from pain.
- **Do not** drink alcohol while taking pain medication.
- **Do not** take more pain medication than you are prescribed.

Keep medications in a secure place. Do not flush medications down the toilet or throw them out. Take any leftover medications to a pharmacy for proper disposal. This is important because prescription medication misuse can be dangerous to you and your loved ones.

Nutrition

- It may take time to get your usual appetite back. Try eating smaller meals and snacks more often.
- Eating balanced, healthy meals will help you get stronger.
- **Always follow your surgeon's or dietitian's instructions about eating and drinking.**

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

- Some prescription medications can make you constipated.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluids a day (like water, milk, juice, decaffeinated tea, or coffee).
- Slowly eat more foods that are high in fibre (like whole-grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits, vegetables, dried peas, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds).
- Ask your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) 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.

Wound care

- **Do not** get your dressing wet.
- You may take your dressing off after 48 hours (2 days), unless your surgeon tells you to wait longer.

If you have bleeding, sit or lie down. Put firm pressure on the area for 20 minutes. **If bleeding does not stop, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

- Sutures or staples can be taken out 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 you are concerned at any time, call your surgeon or 811 to talk to a registered nurse.

If it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have any of the following:

- **Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and/or vomiting (throwing up) that do not go away**
- **Fever** (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) that is not helped by Tylenol® and lasts more than 48 hours
- **Signs of a blood clot in 1 or both of your legs**, like redness, swelling, warmth, or pain
 - › You have a higher risk of blood clots after major abdominal (stomach area) surgery
- **Diarrhea** (loose, watery poop) that lasts for more than 24 hours (1 day), or is getting worse
 - › Some surgeries (like 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) that last longer than 48 hours, like:
 - › Pressure, pain, or burning while peeing
 - › Trouble peeing
 - › Fever
- **Incision (cut) problems**, like:
 - › Redness, swelling, or warmth around your incision that gets worse, especially if you have a fever. Some redness around your incision and clear drainage is common when it is healing.
 - › Green or yellowish drainage (pus)
 - › Edges of your incision come apart

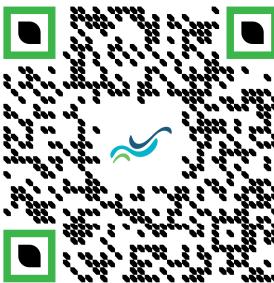
My surgeon's name: _____

My surgeon's phone number: _____

For more patient education resources, visit:

› www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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)



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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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