

# Information post-women's surgery: Laparotomy

Please check that you have the following information or services before you go home (discharged) and that you understand their purpose. Ask if you are unsure or would like more information.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> OPD appointment or when to see your local GP     | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel bookings and forms (if applicable) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discharge medications                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Copy of Discharge Summary                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private X-rays, personal belongings, medications | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical certificate                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Where and when to seek advice                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Family notified                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compliments and Concerns pamphlet                | <input type="checkbox"/> Physiotherapy information                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contraceptive / Fertility information            |  |

## Medications

It is normal to have some pain (including cramps) post-surgery. Taking regular paracetamol (Panadol®) every four to six hours will help to keep your pain under control (see manufacturers instructions for recommended dose). A maximum of only eight Panadol® tablets per day is advised. Additionally, to help with cramps and pain, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Nurofen®) may be useful.

If you have been prescribed stronger analgesia, remember to take regular laxatives as constipation can cause more pain.

As your body heals, this discomfort should decrease and you can gradually reduce the amount of pain medication you are taking. Remember, some discomfort is normal, but pain is a signal to slow down and rest.

## Diet

Avoid constipation by:

- Drinking extra fluids, especially water. This also helps to prevent urinary infections.
- Adding fibre to your diet, e.g. wholemeal bread, fruit and vegetables.
- Drinking a glass of pear or prune juice twice a day.
- Exercising gently and moving around more.
- If wind is a problem, you may find trying peppermint or chamomile tea useful.
- Using laxatives as necessary (e.g. Coloxyl®). Depending on what medications you are on, you may have been prescribed two to five days of laxatives to take home.

For more information, ask for a diet sheet or visit [www.health.qld.gov.au/eatwellbeactive](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/eatwellbeactive)

## Vaginal discharge

- You may experience slight pink or old brown discharge on your sanitary pad or liner for the next three weeks. Do not use tampons or douche as this may cause infection.

- If you still have periods, expect them within four to six weeks of discharge, unless you have been otherwise advised.
- If your bleeding continues or changes in any way you should seek your local doctor's advice or go to your local or Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital emergency department.

## Wound care

Keep your wound clean and dry to assist in healing. Remove any dressings before showering then pat the wound dry with a clean soft towel. Do not use talcum powder or disinfectant. You may have a small amount of pale ooze along the wound for seven to ten days.

- Apply a soft pad or Band-Aid to keep the wound dry and protect your clothing. Once well-healed, you do not need to keep the incision covered.
- Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes for two weeks.
- Leave Steri-strips (tape) in place until peeling off. In most cases your sutures will be removed prior to discharge or will dissolve in about two weeks. If this is not the case, then you will be advised on what to do.

## Activity

- Rest is important, take short naps but do not spend all day in bed.
- Continue to wear your compression stockings when resting, also if driving for over an hour or flying.
- Walking is the best exercise to start once you get home – progress at your own pace by starting with small distances and slowly build up.
- You should be able to resume your regular activities once you feel comfortable.
- Depending on your type of work, you can return to work after about four to six weeks. Check with your doctor if you have any queries.
- Avoid heavy lifting (over ten kilos (20 pounds) of weight) for four to six weeks to minimise stress on your healing wounds, both internal and external. If you cannot easily lift an object with one hand, ask for help.
- Avoid driving until full mobility returns and strong analgesia is no longer required (approximately four weeks). The first time you drive, you should be accompanied. However for medico-legal reasons it is important to check with your insurance company prior to recommencing driving.
- Avoid heavy exercise / swimming for four to six weeks after the operation – prefer to the physiotherapy discharge pamphlet for post-operative exercises and care.
- Pushing yourself too fast after surgery will only cause setbacks in your recovery. Discomfort should decrease a little each day. Increases in energy and activity are signs that recovery is going well.

## Sexual activity

Penetrative sex (vaginal intercourse) is not recommended until the complete healing of the suture line and internal healing has happened (approximately six weeks). Additionally, you may need to use a water-based lubricant (e.g. KY Jelly® or Sylk®) when recommencing sexual activity. If intercourse is painful after eight weeks, seek medical advice.

## When to seek advice

If you experience any of the following symptoms that are not relieved by your usual medications or practices you should seek your local doctor's advice, or go to either your local or the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital emergency department as soon as possible:

- Sudden shivers or chills/fevers, hot flushes or sweating.
- Unusual shortness of breath, chest pain or pain when breathing.
- Severe abdominal pain or cramps.
- Abdominal bloating associated with no bowel movement or vomiting.

- An increase or change in wound discharge.
- An increase in redness and tenderness around the wound or suture line.
- Increased vaginal bleeding, offensive smelling or abnormal coloured vaginal discharge.
- Burning, stinging, excessive frequency or difficulty in passing urine.
- Tenderness and/or swelling or a hot sore area in the calf muscles.
- Anything else concerning you.

## Follow up appointments

It is important that you have an appointment four to six weeks after your operation with your local doctor to check how you are going and to give you the opportunity to discuss any queries or concerns you may have. In addition, general reproductive health care may be done if required.

If necessary, your hospital doctor will request and organise a follow-up appointment for you, which will be posted to you four weeks prior to the appointment date, please ensure you phone and confirm this appointment as per instruction in the offer letter.

If you have any concerns, please contact your local doctor or go to either your local of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital emergency department.

**If you would like further information, please contact: 13 HEALTH (13 432 584).**



Partnering with Consumers National Standard 2.4.1

Consumers and/or carers provided feedback on this publication.

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