

Major Gynaecological Surgery Discharge Advice

Information for patients

Recovery period

Recovery time following major abdominal surgery varies from woman to woman, and is dependent on a variety of factors, including your general health. Generally, however, you should be returning to normal activity within four to six weeks.

Wound care and vaginal bleeding

If your wound closures have not been removed before you are discharged home, you can have them removed by your GP practice nurse. Ideally you should leave all closed and dry wounds uncovered to aid healing, and avoid tight-fitting clothing during your recovery period. Contact your GP if you feel feverish or notice any bleeding, discharge or swelling around the wound site.

Bathe or shower as you would do normally at home. Avoid heavily scented soaps and bubble bath. Do not use salt or disinfectant to bathe in.

You should expect some vaginal bleeding or discharge to continue for a few weeks.

The discharge may be dark red or brown. Contact your GP if the bleeding becomes heavy, you are passing clots or the discharge has an offensive smell. Change your sanitary towel regularly to help reduce the risk of infection. Do not use tampons or place anything inside your vagina. Douching is not recommended. Your general hygiene is important – please remember, after going to the toilet always wipe from front to back to help prevent cross-infection.

Activity

You are still at risk of developing blood clots in your veins during the recovery period. Regular and gentle exercise is recommended. Walking is an excellent form of exercise which you can increase each day. If you become tired during any activity take a short rest. Gentle exercise, such as stair-climbing is perfectly acceptable and you can start when you feel ready. Try not to lift anything heavier than a two litre bottle of water. You can increase the load after four weeks but remember good lifting techniques and keep anything that you are carrying close to your body. Housework involving heavy lifting, vacuuming and low bending should be avoided for the first four weeks. You should also avoid carrying heavy shopping bags during this time.

Diet

It is advisable that you follow a well-balanced diet on discharge. Try to introduce high fibre foods to reduce the risk of constipation. You are more likely to experience constipation whilst you are taking painkillers or if you have been prescribed iron tablets. Eating foods like wholemeal bread, fruit, salad and vegetables, cereals, beans and pulses will help.

Try to eat protein rich foods such as fish, eggs, meat, leafy green vegetables, beans and pulses to help promote the healing process. Surgery increases the risk of contracting a urinary tract infection. To reduce this risk, aim to drink about 1.5 litres of fluid per day, most of which should be clear, such as water or squash. A good fluid intake will also help prevent constipation.

Alcohol should be avoided when taking some medications. If alcohol should be avoided, this information will be written on the box or bottle of medication that you take home.

Driving

Please check your insurance policy for restrictions following surgery. You can drive when you will feel comfortable wearing a seatbelt and can perform an emergency stop and get into a position to reverse the car easily, providing your insurance policy will cover you.

Flying/Abroad

If you are planning to go on holiday after your surgery, you should always check with your insurance company that they cover you after an operation. Blood clots/deep vein thrombosis are more common if you are dehydrated or immobile. Ensure you drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol to prevent dehydration during travel and make sure you move around regularly to improve blood circulation. Some people recommend the use of support stockings, but you need to ensure that they fit appropriately, as poorly fitting support stockings can cause more harm than good. You may want to wait until you have had your follow-up appointment before going on holiday.

Sex

It is your personal choice when to resume sexual activity. It is advisable that you wait until you feel comfortable physically and emotionally.

If you have had a total laparoscopic hysterectomy, it is advised that you abstain from penetrative vaginal sexual intercourse for three months after the procedure. This allows time for the sutures at the top of the vagina to heal. For other types of hysterectomy, you should wait until any vaginal discharge has stopped.

You may experience some vaginal dryness and we recommend the use of a water-based lubricant gel to maximise comfort. You do not need to use contraception following a hysterectomy, whether or not your ovaries have been removed. You will still need to use a condom to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections. If you have had a subtotal hysterectomy you will need to continue having cervical smear tests until the age of 64.

If you want to consider taking hormone replacement therapy you can discuss this with your Nurse or Doctor.

Emotions

It is not unusual to feel tired, moody and emotional after major surgery. Some women complain of 'feeling the blues'. Other women are quite relieved afterwards that their symptoms have been removed following surgery. However, everyone reacts differently to having a general anaesthetic, surgery and a length of stay in hospital.

Be assured that things should settle down over a course of time.

Returning to work

Your return to work will depend on the type of job that you do and how you are feeling. You can consider returning to work four to six weeks following your discharge from hospital. Your Doctor will be able to provide you with the appropriate sick certificate.

A follow-up appointment may be made for you, depending on the surgery you have had. This will be given to you before leaving hospital or sent to your home address.

If you have any other questions before you leave the hospital, please ask any of the nursing staff - they will be happy to assist you.

Useful contacts

Female Surgical Ward: 01270 612048

Please do not hesitate to contact the Female Surgical Ward at any time following your discharge from hospital.

For more useful post-operative information visit The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) website: www.rcog.org.uk

This leaflet is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

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