



California Pacific  
Medical Center  
A Sutter Health Affiliate

# Abdominal Surgery

## Caring for Yourself at Home

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LEARNING ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

Beyond Medicine.

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## Your Checklist for Going Home

The information contained in this section will help you manage your care at home. Review this checklist carefully before you go home. If you have any additional questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

- ✓ Plan your transportation home.
- ✓ Schedule the date for your next doctor's appointment.
- ✓ Get your prescription(s).
- ✓ Know what medication to take, its purpose, and possible side effects.
- ✓ Understand the danger signals related to your operation. Call your doctor if you experience any of these symptoms before your next appointment.
- ✓ Know your activity limitations.
- ✓ Know how to change your dressing (if you have one).

## Arranging Transportation Home

You should be able to go home safely in a family member or friend's car. You may feel more comfortable with a pillow over your abdomen under the seatbelt.

An RN Case Manager will help you make arrangements if you need a ride home or help getting up the stairs. Most insurance plans will not pay for transportation home.

## Making a Follow-up Appointment After Your Surgery

Your surgeon will see you in the office about 1-2 weeks after your surgery. Call the surgeon's office to make an appointment.

## Understanding Your Medications

- Generally, your surgeon will order a pain medication when you go home.
- If the pain medication does not control your pain, please let your surgeon know.
- Constipation is a common side effect of pain medication. Here are some tips to prevent constipation: take a stool softener, add fiber to your diet, drink plenty of fluids, and increase your activity level.
- Some medications may be expensive and insurance coverage varies. Let your surgeon know if you have difficulty filling your prescriptions. There may be alternative medications available that are less expensive.

## Your Recovery Continues at Home

Please review the following list carefully to be aware of what is normal for your recovery, and what signs and symptoms may require additional attention by your surgeon.

- **Feeling Weak and Tired:** It is normal to feel weak and tired after abdominal surgery. You may need more sleep and also you may notice a change in your sleep patterns. Be assured, over time your sleeping patterns will return to normal.
- **Fluid Draining from the Incision Site:** It is normal to have a small amount of clear yellow or red-yellow fluid draining from the incision in the first few days after surgery. Thick, foul-smelling drainage or redness around the incision is a warning sign of infection. This is most likely to occur 7-14 days after surgery. If this happens, call your surgeon's office immediately.
- **Pain from the Incision:** Pain from the incision is normal and it will change from day to day and with different activities. It will gradually decrease. Contact your surgeon's office if your pain medication does not relieve your pain.
- **Cramping, Abdominal Pain, and Bloating:** You may experience cramping, abdominal pain, and bloating, but these symptoms will improve over time. Eat small, frequent meals. If you have severe pain that does not improve or persistent vomiting, call your surgeon's office immediately.
- **Dehydration:** You should drink enough fluids to keep your urine a light yellow color. Avoid alcoholic beverages during your recovery.
- **Discomfort from the Urinary Catheter:** If you had a urinary catheter in your bladder, it is not unusual to have minor discomfort during urination for several days after the catheter is removed. If the discomfort does not go away or is severe, call your surgeon's office.
- **Loose, Watery Bowel Movements:** After bowel surgery, you may have loose, watery bowel movements for several days. If you have persistent watery diarrhea, call your surgeon's office.

### Recognizing Danger Signals

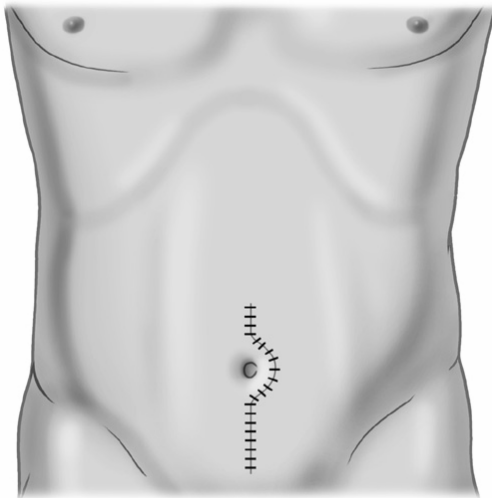
**Call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:**

- Inability to tolerate foods or fluids.
- Persistent nausea or vomiting.
- Swelling or pain in either leg or calf.
- Signs of surgical site infection: increased redness, increased drainage or swelling, and worsening pain.
- If you feel warm or chilled, check your temperature. Call the doctor for a temperature of 101° F/ 38.5°C or above.

## Planning Your Activity

- After abdominal surgery, it is normal to feel weak and tired for several weeks after you return home. Because each person is unique, the speed of your recovery and your ability to return to normal activities may vary.
- Take regular walks several times daily. Avoid strenuous exercise such as lifting, carrying, pulling, or moving heavy objects (more than 5 pounds) until your surgeon says it is safe.
- Do not sit for long periods as it may cause swelling of your ankles and feet.
- Sexual activity may be resumed as tolerated, unless otherwise instructed.
- Everyone recovers differently. Please check with your surgeon about when to return to work and when to start driving. Usually, after your first post-operative visit (10 days – 2 weeks), your surgeon will discuss when you will be able to start driving.

## Caring for Your Surgical Incision



**Incision Closed with Staples**

- You may wash the incision daily with soap and water; pat dry gently. Keep your incision clean and dry until all the staples or stitches are removed.
  - Do not apply cream or ointment to the staples or stitches, unless instructed to do so by your surgeon.
  - The staples or stitches will usually be taken out 5-7 days after your surgery. Your surgeon or a nurse will remove the staples or stitches.
- You may have Steri-Strips® (incision tapes) on the incision. These will fall off by themselves in 1-2 weeks.
  - After the staples are removed, and the Steri-Strips® have fallen off, the scar will fade and soften over time.

## Tips on Bathing

You may shower as soon as you feel able. Avoid tub baths until approved by your surgeon.

## About Your Diet

- A balanced diet is important for your general health and healing.
- Follow a soft, easy-to-digest diet for the first week. Advance to your usual diet as tolerated.
- Ask your nurse if you would like additional information about your diet.
- If you have any specific questions about your diet after you leave the hospital, call your surgeon.

## Home Health Care Services

- **Meeting with an RN Case Manager in the Hospital:**  
An RN Case Manager will meet with you in the hospital before you go home if you need nursing care at home, equipment, supplies, or extra help at home. The RN Case Manager will help you find out what services your insurance plan pays for and, if needed, will help arrange them.
- **Visiting Nurse or Physical Therapist:**  
If you are scheduled for home health care services, the agency will call you at home to set up a time for the first visit. Staff will visit you on a short-term basis. The focus of home health care is to help you adjust at home to changes following surgery.

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Note: This information is not meant to replace any information or personal medical advice which you get directly from your doctor(s). If you have any questions about this information, such as the risks or benefits of the treatment listed, please ask your doctor(s).