

# Abdominal Surgery

## What to Expect While You Are in the Hospital

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LEARNING ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

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## On the Day of Your Surgery

When you arrive, a registered nurse (RN) greets you and prepares you for surgery.

### Your Nursing Care

- **Changing into a Surgical Gown, Removing Contacts and Dentures:** The RN asks you to change into a surgical gown and to remove any remaining jewelry (including rings). Also, you need to remove contact lenses and dentures. If you are hearing impaired with a hearing aid, alert the RN.
- **Recording Your Weight, Temperature, Pulse, and Blood Pressure:** The RN records your weight and takes your vital signs such as blood pressure, pulse, and temperature.
- **Placing an Intravenous (IV) Line in an Arm Vein:** The RN places an intravenous (IV) line in your arm for medications and fluids during your surgery.

### What Happens in the Operating Room?

A member of the Operating Room (OR) staff escorts you to the Operating Room Holding Area. The staff may walk you into the OR or wheel you on a stretcher or in a wheelchair.

***In the Holding Area:*** Medical and nursing staff may ask you similar questions about your medical history. Surgery is a team effort and there are a number of repetitive steps to ensure your safety.

- Your anesthesiologist meets with you to discuss anesthesia care before your surgery.
- Your operating room nurse meets with you to go over the nursing care during surgery.
- Your nurse escorts you to the surgical suite and assists you in lying down on the surgical bed.

***In the Surgical Suite:*** Many activities now take place at once.

- Your anesthesiologist connects you to a number of monitors such as a blood pressure cuff, a cardiac monitor, and an oxygen sensor. You may be asked to breathe oxygen for a few moments before anesthesia begins.
- Your nurse may apply elastic stockings to your legs. Your nurse may also apply sequential compression stockings to your legs. These special plastic sleeves attach to a small machine and gently squeeze your legs every few minutes.
- A safety belt is placed across your thighs to prevent a fall.
- The nurse may place a urinary catheter (small thin tube) in your bladder once you are asleep. A urinary catheter drains urine from your bladder during surgery.
- Before surgery, the team confirms the surgical site.

## Surgery

When all preparations are complete, your anesthesiologist administers anesthesia and your surgery begins.

## Transferring to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit

Immediately after surgery, the staff transfers you to the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) to recover from anesthesia. The PACU is a large room with several beds. This is where you will wake up after surgery. Unfortunately, your family will not be able to visit in this area. However, your family may visit you as soon as you are in your hospital room.

### *Your Nursing Care in the PACU:*

- Monitoring of your blood pressure, breathing, and heart rate.
- Administering oxygen through a small tube in your nose.
- Checking your bandages to make sure that they remain dry.
- Monitoring of your pain and administering medications in your intravenous (IV) line to relieve postoperative pain.
- Arranging your transfer to a hospital room on a stretcher or in a hospital bed when your condition is stable.

## Your Nursing Care After Surgery

After abdominal surgery, most patients go home in 4 or 5 days. Some patients may need more time to recover and some may require less.

After your surgery, your nurse helps you with the following activities. As you become stronger, you may do these on your own:

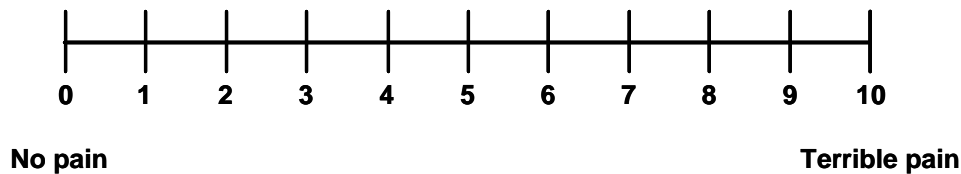
- **Change Position:** Turn every 2 hours from your back to your side.
- **Cough and Deep Breathe:** Every 2 hours.
- **Use the Incentive Spirometer:** Use the incentive spirometer (a plastic breathing device) to take deep breaths to expand your lungs.
- **Do Ankle Pump Exercises:** Every 2 hours bend your ankles up and down and alternate your feet.
- **Wear Sequential Compression Stockings in Bed:** Remind your nurse to replace your stockings when you are in bed.
- **Take Short Walks:** The nurse starts walking with you soon after surgery. The nurse helps you to get out of bed, sit in a chair, and walk short distances several times a day. Ask them questions about the best ways to move and get out of bed.

## Managing Your Pain

- **Take action to control your pain as soon as the pain starts.** It is more difficult to relieve pain once it has become severe.
- **Report your pain.** If you are in pain, tell your doctor or nurse. Because each person experiences pain differently, you can help your doctors and nurses "rate" your pain using the pain scale below. A **0** on the scale means **no pain**, and a **10** on the scale means **the worst pain you can imagine**.
- **Treating your pain early is key to good pain control and important to your recovery.** Take your pain medication before doing something that may increase your level of discomfort such as getting out of bed to walk.

### 0-10 Numeric Pain Intensity Scale

Please point to the number that best describes your pain.



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- **PCA Pump (Patient Controlled Analgesia):**
  - This is a machine that allows you to give yourself pain medication when you need it.
  - **For your safety, only you may push the PCA machine button.** It is not safe for anyone else to push the button for you. You give yourself a dose of pain medication through a tube into your vein.
  - You control the machine; in most cases, if you don't push the button, you don't get any pain medication.
  - Limits are set so that you can safely medicate yourself to relieve pain. Ask the nurse how often you can push the button (usually 6–15 minutes).
  - Many patients find it helpful to take pain medication by mouth to help them sleep through the night when they are using PCA.

## About Your Diet

After surgery, your surgeon advances your diet slowly. Usually, after abdominal surgery you may be able to have only ice chips for a day or two until you pass gas. Once you pass gas, you will be started on clear liquids. When you are able to drink liquids without any problems, you will progress to soft foods and then your regular diet.

## Tips for Your Recovery

- 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 will vary.
- Keep your pain under control, so you can move about as much as possible.
- Spend time out of bed each day. Get out of bed at least 2-3 times each day and walk for short distances or sit in a chair at the bedside. The nurses will help you get out of bed the first couple of days.
- Change your position, cough, take deep breaths, and use your incentive spirometer (plastic breathing tool) every 2 hours in bed.
- Do ankle pump exercises every 2 hours in bed. Bend your ankles up and down alternating your feet.
- If you have sequential compression stockings, use them while you are in bed.

## Getting Ready to Go Home

- RN Case Managers are available to assist you with getting ready to go home, if needed.
- Social workers are available to assist you with concerns regarding financial and family issues.
- Social workers are also available for help in emergencies or in particularly difficult situations. They can also give you information about community resources for assistance over the long term.
- Financial counselors are available should you have questions or concerns about your health insurance.
- Chaplains are available at all times. Please let your doctor or nurse know if you would like us to arrange for a visit.

## More Ways to Learn

**Watch the Patient Education Video Channel** – You can use the video library in your hospital room by following these instructions:

- Tune to channel 60 on the television set, and follow the on-screen directions.
- Pacific Campus patients dial extension 78888; California Campus patients dial extension 21000; and Davies Campus patients dial extension 33600.
- Order a videotape for viewing according to category or title by listening to information given over the telephone.

### Notes and Questions to Ask My Doctor

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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).