

COLORECTAL: Patient Discharge Information

What should I expect after surgery?

- How you feel after surgery will depend on your previous activity level and health status, on the type of operation you had and how big an operation it was.
- Most people do not feel back to normal for 4-8 weeks or more after major surgery. It is not unusual to have less appetite; to feel tired; to sleep poorly, and feel depressed. If your symptoms persist or worsen contact your doctor's office.

How will I manage my pain at home?

- You will achieve the best pain control if you take your pain medication regularly at the prescribed intervals (usually every 4 to 6 hours) to prevent pain build up. As you get better, you can reduce the dose.
- **NSAIDS** like ibuprofen (*Motrin, Advil*), naproxen (*Naprosyn, Aleve*) or acetaminophen (*Tylenol*) taken every 6 hours are effective in reducing pain and reducing the need for stronger, narcotic medications.
- Strong pain medication or narcotics (like *Vicodin or Oxycodone*) may be prescribed as well.
- Narcotic medications cause **constipation**. Stool softeners (*Colace or Ducosate*) and fiber (fruits, brans, vegetables, Metamucil) and extra fluid intake help to prevent this, but a stimulant laxative (e.g., *Milk of Magnesia, Senekot*) may be needed as well.
- **DO NOT DRIVE OR DRINK ALCOHOL** while taking narcotic pain medications.
- Many combination pain medications, such as *Vicodin*, and *Darvocet*, contain *Tylenol*. To prevent *Tylenol* overdose, do not take *Tylenol* at the same time as a combination narcotic that contains *Tylenol*. You may take them 4-6 hours apart from each other.

Can I resume my previous Medications?

- Yes, unless directed not to by your doctor
- Before discharge, be sure to review your previous medications with your doctor or inpatient medical team

How will I care for my incision?

- Your incision or wound may be sensitive, so wearing loose clothing may feel more comfortable.

- You can gently wash your incision with soap and water. Pat dry using a clean towel.
- You may shower but you should **avoid soaking** your incision underwater, like in a bath, hot tub or swimming pool, until sutures or staples are out and the incision is well healed.
- **DO NOT APPLY ointments or powders** on your incision or wound unless your doctor tells you to.
- **DO not Smoke**. Smoking is bad for wound healing
- If you have paper tape (called "*Steri-Strips*") and/or Tegaderm (*a clear plastic dressing*) on your incision, leave these in place until they begin to fall off naturally. If they become discolored or messy, you may remove them 10-14 days after application.
- If you have staples on your incision, leave them in place. They will be removed by your home care nurse or in the clinic on a follow up visit. They are usually removed 7-14 days after surgery.
- If you have a perineal (anal area) incision, you may have clear drainage. You may wear a dressing pad in your underwear like a "kotex pad" or "ABD pad" to absorb the drainage. *If you have sutures (stitches)* that don't dissolve, they will be removed in 14-21 days after surgery in the hospital or in the clinic.

How do I care for an open incision or wound (if you have one)?

- *If you have an open wound*, you and your family will be taught to gently pack the wound 2-3 times a day with plain gauze moistened with normal saline, Chlorpactin solution, or plain tap water. A home care nurse may visit you to assist with your wound care and to bring dressing supplies. (This **varies** depending on your health care insurance). You will be given a prescription for the solution to be obtained at the pharmacy, if needed, and possibly for the dressing supplies.

What can I do at home? What are my restrictions?

- **Walk as much as possible.** Gradually increase the length of time and the distance that you walk.
- **Return to normal, non stressful activities as you feel able to**
- You may climb stairs using the hand rail.
- Daily rest periods are encouraged but do not sit for long periods of time
- **Do Not Drive** until you are no longer in pain, are not taking narcotics, and your activity level is back to normal. Usually, this is 2-4 weeks after discharge. If there are any questions, wait until your doctor sees you at your follow-up visit.
- **Do Not Strain to lift, pull or push anything over 10 pounds (equal to a gallon of milk)** for 4-6 weeks, or as directed by your doctor. If it hurts, you probably shouldn't do it.
- **Avoid** activities that make you tense or strain your abdominal muscles. You should avoid bending and twisting, in particular, which will be uncomfortable.
- **No** sexual activity until discussing it with your doctor at your follow-up clinic visits. Sexual activity can usually be resumed 3-6 weeks following surgery or when it is comfortable to do so.
- If you have a *perineal (anal area) incision*, you may want to avoid sitting for long periods (greater than 30 minutes) or on hard surfaces.

How do I care for my drain (if I have one)?

- If you have a drain, the nursing staff will instruct you and your family on care for the drain. You may be directed by your doctor to empty the bulb and record the amount of drainage daily, or flush the tubing. You will be asked to bring in a record of the amount of drainage to your next follow-up clinic visit.

How do I care for my ileostomy or colostomy?

- If you have an ileostomy or colostomy, you will be instructed by the enterostomal therapy nurse and floor nursing staff on how to care for your stoma. You will be given additional written materials and prescriptions for appliance and ostomy supplies you will need.

Will I need/receive home care services?

- You may request home care services to assist with your recovery at home, depending on your needs and your health care insurance coverage.
- Your **Discharge Planner Nurse** will discuss the options with you.

Will I have any diet restrictions?

- Not usually. Eat what looks good, preferably a well balanced diet. Ask your doctor or dietician.
- Your appetite may be decreased at first, but it will improve as you feel better. You may find it easier eat smaller, frequent meals.
- You may drink dietary supplements, such as *Ensure Boost* or *Carnation* instant breakfast, or if you are diabetic, *Glycerna*. In addition, you may find taking an over the counter vitamin may improve wound healing.
- If you have an ileostomy, you will receive additional information on how to avoid dehydration.

FOLLOW UP VISIT:

You will ordinarily have a return visit scheduled in the surgery clinic in 1-3 weeks. You will be mailed the appointment time. In addition, the clinical physician assistant (PA-C) may call you 1-3 days after your discharge to see how you are doing.

WHEN DO I CALL FOR ADVICE?

- If you have a fever of $>101^{\circ}$, or chills
- If you have increasing pain or cramps
- If you become nauseated, vomit, are unable to eat or stop moving your bowels
- If your incision/wound/drain site becomes red, swollen, more tender.
- If your incision opens or drains fluid or pus
- If your urine is dark and decreases in amount
- If your drain stops working or you have a marked change in the amount of drainage