

# Discharge Instructions: After Your Surgery



You've just had surgery. During surgery, you were given medicine called anesthesia to keep you relaxed and free of pain. After surgery, you may have some pain or nausea. This is common. Here are some tips for feeling better and getting well after surgery.

## Going home

Your healthcare provider will show you how to take care of yourself when you go home. They'll also answer your questions. Have an adult family member or friend drive you home. For the first 24 hours after your surgery:

- Don't drive or use heavy equipment.
- Don't make important decisions or sign legal papers.
- Take medicines as directed.
- Don't drink alcohol.
- Have someone stay with you, if needed. They can watch for problems and help keep you safe.

Be sure to go to all follow-up visits with your healthcare provider. And rest after your surgery for as long as your provider tells you to.

## Coping with pain

If you have pain after surgery, pain medicine will help you feel better. Take it as directed, before pain becomes severe. Also, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about other ways to control pain. This might be with heat, ice, or relaxation. And follow any other instructions your surgeon or nurse gives you.



## Tips for taking pain medicine

To get the best relief possible, remember these points:

- Pain medicines can upset your stomach. Taking them with a little food may help.

- Most pain relievers taken by mouth need at least 20 to 30 minutes to start to work.
- Don't wait till your pain becomes severe before you take your medicine. Try to time your medicine so that you can take it before starting an activity. This might be before you get dressed, go for a walk, or sit down for dinner.
- Constipation is a common side effect of some pain medicines. Call your healthcare provider before taking any medicines, such as laxatives or stool softeners, to help ease constipation. Also ask if you should skip any foods. Drinking lots of fluids and eating foods, such as fruits and vegetables, that are high in fiber can also help. Remember, don't take laxatives unless your surgeon has prescribed them.
- Drinking alcohol and taking pain medicine can cause dizziness and slow your breathing. It can even be deadly. Don't drink alcohol while taking pain medicine.
- Pain medicine can make you react more slowly to things. Don't drive or run machinery while taking pain medicine.

Your healthcare provider may tell you to take acetaminophen to help ease your pain. Ask them how much you're supposed to take each day. Acetaminophen or other pain relievers may interact with your prescription medicines or other over-the-counter (OTC) medicines. Some prescription medicines have acetaminophen and other ingredients in them. Using both prescription and OTC acetaminophen for pain can cause you to accidentally overdose. Read the labels on your OTC medicines with care. This will help you to clearly know the list of ingredients, how much to take, and any warnings. It may also help you not take too much acetaminophen. If you have questions or don't understand the information, ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider to explain it to you before you take the OTC medicine.

## Managing nausea

Some people have an upset stomach (nausea) after surgery. This is often because of anesthesia, pain, or pain medicine, less movement of food in the stomach, or the stress of surgery. These tips will help you handle nausea and eat healthy foods as you get better. If you were on a special food plan before surgery, ask your healthcare provider if you should follow it while you get better. Check with your provider on how your eating should progress. It may depend on the surgery you had. These general tips may help:

- Don't push yourself to eat. Your body will tell you when to eat and how much.
- Start off with clear liquids and soup. They're easier to digest.
- Next try semi-solid foods as you feel ready. These include mashed potatoes, applesauce, and gelatin.
- Slowly move to solid foods. Don't eat fatty, rich, or spicy foods at first.
- Don't force yourself to have 3 large meals a day. Instead eat smaller amounts more often.
- Take pain medicines with a small amount of solid food, such as crackers or toast. This helps prevent nausea.

## When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- You still have too much pain, or the pain gets worse, after taking the medicine. The medicine may not be strong enough. Or there may be a complication from the surgery.
- You feel too sleepy, dizzy, or groggy. The medicine may be too strong.
- Side effects, such as nausea or vomiting. Your healthcare provider may advise taking other medicines to treat these or may change your treatment plan..
- Skin changes, such as rash, itching, or hives. This may mean you have an allergic reaction. Your provider may advise taking other medicines.
- The incision looks different (for instance, part of it opens up).

- Bleeding or fluid leaking from the incision site, and you weren't told to expect that.
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider.

## Call 911

Call **911** right away if you have:

- Trouble breathing
- Facial swelling

## If you have obstructive sleep apnea

You were given anesthesia medicine during surgery to keep you comfortable and free of pain. After surgery, you may have more apnea spells because of this medicine and other medicines you were given. The spells may last longer than normal.

At home:

- Keep using the continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device when you sleep. Unless your healthcare provider tells you not to, use it when you sleep, day or night. CPAP is a common device used to treat obstructive sleep apnea.
- Talk with your provider before taking any pain medicine, muscle relaxants, or sedatives. Your provider will tell you about the possible dangers of taking these medicines.
- Contact your provider if your sleeping changes a lot even when taking medicines as directed.

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