

Colorectal Surgery: Recovering in the Hospital and at Home



You have had colorectal (bowel) surgery. When the surgery is done, you'll be taken to the recovery room. This is also called the PACU (post-anesthesia care unit). There, you will be carefully watched. Your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing will be checked. You'll also get pain medicine to keep you comfortable.

You'll be moved to a normal hospital room when you're ready. You'll then be watched closely to be sure you're healing well. Your hospital stay may last from a few days to a week. Or it may be longer. Once home, follow instructions to help make sure you have a full recovery.



Right after surgery

- If you have a urinary catheter, it will likely be taken out shortly after surgery.
- Your IV (intravenous) line will stay in place for a few days to give you fluids. And you'll keep getting medicine for pain.
- Soon after surgery, you'll be up and walking around. This helps improve blood flow and prevent blood clots. It also helps your bowels get back to normal. This will help prevent a bowel blockage (ileus). Your healthcare team will listen to the sounds in your belly (your 'bowel sounds'). This is to make sure your bowels are starting to work normally.
- You'll be given breathing exercises to keep your lungs clear.

If a stoma (ostomy) was made during surgery, your healthcare providers will show you how to care for it. You may also meet with an ostomy nurse. They will teach you about stoma care.

Eating again

In some cases, you may need to wait to eat. But many times, you can start eating lightly soon after surgery. This is part of a program for faster recovery. It's called enhanced recovery after surgery.

Recovering at home

In most cases, you'll visit your healthcare provider shortly after leaving the hospital. You can get back to your normal routine about a month or two after surgery. Full recovery may take 4 to 6 weeks or longer.

While your body heals, you may tire more easily. You also are likely to have some bloating. Loose stools and more frequent bowel movements are also common. This may get better over time. But it may never fully go

away. It will depend on the type of bowel surgery you had and specifics to your case.

Resuming everyday activities

Being active helps your body heal. But you must protect your healing incisions. Make sure you:

- Walk as much as you feel up to.
- Don't do any heavy lifting or vigorous exercise until your healthcare provider says it's OK. Follow your provider's advice about climbing stairs and bathing.
- Don't drive right away. Wait until you're no longer taking pain medicines. Also wait until you can readily press down on the brake pedal.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills
- Nausea or vomiting that doesn't get better
- Unusual redness, swelling, drainage, or pain around your incision
- Leg swelling
- Unexpected diarrhea, or not passing gas or having a bowel movement for 24 hours
- Belly swelling that gets worse or doesn't go away
- Pain in the belly or around the stoma that gets worse

Call 911

Call 911 if any of the following occur:

- Trouble breathing
- Unusual chest pain
- Large amount of bleeding from your rectum or the surgery site

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