

# Discharge Instructions: Surgery for Cancer of the Uterus



Surgery is the most common treatment for both types of uterine cancer: endometrial carcinoma and uterine sarcoma. You may have had your uterus removed. This is called a hysterectomy. You may have had your fallopian tubes and ovaries removed, too. This is called a hysterectomy with bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy. Sometimes lymph nodes in the area are also removed.

After you heal from surgery, you might need more treatment, like radiation, chemotherapy, or both. But now you need to rest and recover. Give yourself time and try to be patient with your body as it heals.

Talk to your healthcare providers about how long you have to wait before going back to your normal activities. Also be sure you know what your pain medicines are and how you should take them, as well as when you need to see your providers again. Follow all instructions given to you by your healthcare providers.

Make sure you:

- Understand what you can and can't do, and follow these instructions.
- Know what your surgery site should look like and how to care for it.
- Know what your medicines are for, how and when to take them, and what side effects you should watch for.
- Keep your follow-up appointments.
- Call your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about how you feel.

## Activity

Be sure you understand what you can and can't do as you recover from surgery. You may have to limit certain activities for a period of time. You may find that you need extra rest throughout the day. Fatigue (feeling tired) and weakness are normal for a few weeks. This will get better over time. But try to get up and move around as you are able. Ask family members or friends to help with shopping, meals, housework, and other tasks.

Make sure you know:

- When you can use stairs. Go slowly and rest every few steps. Have someone with you at first. Try to plan your day so you don't need to go up and down often.
- What your weight limits are for lifting. Don't lift anything heavy until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- When you can drive. Don't drive until you are free of pain and no longer taking prescription pain medicine. This may take a few weeks.
- When you can do housework, yard work, or return to your job.
- How much you should walk. Ask your healthcare provider what type of exercise might be good for you as you recover.

## Other self-care

To help with your recovery at home and prevent problems:

- Take only the medicines that your healthcare provider prescribes. Tell your provider if you take other medicines. These include prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, and other supplements.

- Take your temperature each day for 7 days after the surgery.
- Take your pain medicine as directed. Ask about side effects it could cause and what you can do to manage them.
- Do the coughing and breathing exercises that you learned in the hospital.
- Try to keep from getting constipated. To do this:
  - Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
  - Drink a lot of water and other healthy drinks.
  - Call your healthcare provider if you are having trouble with bowel movements. You may need a stool softener or laxative.
- Talk with your healthcare providers about taking care of your incisions. Check your incisions daily for signs of infection. These include redness, swelling, pain, warmth, and drainage. Also watch the edges of the incision to be sure it's not opening up.
- Ask when you can shower. Don't take a tub bath until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- Don't put anything in your vagina. Don't use tampons or douches until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- Ask when you can have sex again. It's very important to follow your provider's instructions about this. The healing vagina is very weak and incisions can open.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have hot flashes or mood swings. There are medicines that can help you if needed.

## Follow-up care

Make a follow-up appointment as instructed. If you're getting more cancer treatment after surgery, make sure you understand what you can do to be ready for treatment.

## When to call your healthcare provider

Talk with your healthcare provider about what other problems you should watch for and when you should call. Ask how to reach your healthcare provider in case of emergency. Be sure you know what number to call on weekends, holidays, and in the evening, too.

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

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Chills
- Signs of infection around the incision, such as redness, drainage, warmth, and pain
- An incision that opens up or the edges pull apart
- Bright red vaginal bleeding or a smelly discharge
- Vaginal bleeding that's more than just spotting
- Trouble passing urine or burning when you urinate
- Severe pain or bloating in your belly
- Chest pain
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat

- Nausea or vomiting that doesn't go away
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Swelling, redness, warmth, or pain in an arm or leg

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