

[Back to Health News & Stories](#)

What To Expect During Recovery After Colon Cancer Surgery

Virtua surgeons perform colon cancer surgeries using minimally invasive and robotic techniques - making recovery quicker and less uncomfortable. Learn about the recuperation.



By [Avi Galler, MD, FACS, FASCRS](#)

Colorectal Surgeon—Virtua Surgical Group

Surgery is the most common treatment for [colon cancer](#), and new technology and procedures continue to make it safer and more effective. Virtua surgeons perform colon cancer surgeries using minimally invasive and [robotic techniques](#), which means recovery is quicker and less uncomfortable. However, it's still important for you to take some time to rest and regain your strength after the operation.

How are colon cancer surgeries performed?

Cancer can grow in any part of the colon or rectum; therefore, a surgeon can remove any part of the colon or rectum as necessary. The goal is to remove the cancer with enough healthy margins to ensure the colon can be reconnected without having a colostomy bag (when one end of the large intestine is diverted through an incision in the abdominal wall to create a stoma, which is an

opening in the skin where a pouch for collecting feces is attached). This may require removing the right or the left side, or any short segment of colon in between.

Every patient is unique, so surgery is tailored specifically for each patient's anatomy.

At Virtua, we perform most colon cancer surgeries with minimally invasive techniques.

Laparoscopic and robotic technology allows us to perform colon cancer surgery through very small incisions, which results in lower risks of complications, faster healing and less pain. Rarely, less invasive techniques aren't adequate and a more traditional, open surgery is required.

Will I be hospitalized as part of my colon cancer surgery recovery?

Colon cancer surgical patients require a brief hospital stay, usually for two to four days after their procedure. The amount of time you spend in the hospital depends on how well you recover after surgery.

During your hospitalization, your surgical care team will follow Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) protocols to promote faster recovery and reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia and blood clots in your legs. ERAS protocols include:

- Encouraging mobility as soon as you can get out of bed
- Avoiding narcotic medications for pain management
- Providing the best nutrition as soon as you can eat

Can I be active when I return home after colon cancer surgery?

After you return home, aim to resume your normal activities. As soon as you feel up to it, you can climb stairs, go for walks, shower and even drive. There are very few limitations, but if it hurts, you should stop doing it.

Be careful to avoid strenuous activity such as heavy exercise or lifting anything more than 20 pounds until you feel well, and your doctor gives his or her approval. Also, avoid taking baths or using hot tubs and swimming pools until your incisions have fully healed.

What should I eat when I return home after colon cancer surgery?

When you return home, stick to low-fiber foods and avoid raw fruits and vegetables at first. You also should eat smaller meals more often for the first two to three weeks to avoid discomfort. Once you have recovered from surgery, you'll be able to resume your regular diet.

When will my bowel function return to normal?

Many patients who have colon cancer surgery find that it temporarily changes the way their bowel functions. You won't be required to have a bowel movement before being discharged from the hospital, but you should have a bowel movement within a few days of returning home.

Because food may not pass through your colon as quickly as it normally does, you could experience bloating, feelings of fullness or loose stools. This is normal and should be temporary, but talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

When should I call my doctor?

Your doctor will schedule a follow-up visit after your surgery, but contact him or her right away if you experience nausea that won't subside, fever, weakness, fainting, or draining wounds.

It's also a good idea to call your doctor if you don't have a bowel movement within a few days of returning home. Depending on your exact symptoms, your doctor may suggest taking a mild laxative such as Milk of Magnesia.

Most people have a smooth recovery after colon cancer surgery, but knowing what to expect can help you return to your normal activities quickly and safely. By understanding what colon cancer surgery recovery typically looks like, you can readily identify problems and avoid serious complications.

For more information about [colorectal surgery](#) at Virtua, call **888-847-8823**.



888-VIRTUA-3



Live Chat



Request a Callback



Contact Us

Quick Links

[MyChart Login](#)

[Careers](#)

[For Employees](#)

[Health and Wellness](#)

Patients & Visitors

[Medical Records](#)

[Pay My Bill](#)

[Financial Statements](#)

[Visitor Information](#)

[COVID-19 Information](#)

[ER Wait Times](#)

[Get Care Now](#)

[Price Transparency](#)

[Joint Notice of Privacy Practices](#)

About Virtua

[Give to Virtua](#)

[News](#)

[Classes & Events](#)

[Newsletter Signup](#)

[Community Programs and Resources](#)

Health Care Professionals

[Physicians' Information Center](#)

[Nursing](#)

[Rowan University Partnership](#)

[Professional Education](#)

[Medical Education](#)

[Certificate and Degree Programs](#)

[Research and Clinical Trials](#)

[Non-Discrimination Policy](#)

[Patient Bill of Rights & Responsibilities](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Digital Services Privacy Statement](#)

[Sitemap](#)

[Copyright © 2024 Virtua Health](#)