

# Home Care After Surgery

When you're ready to leave the hospital, you will be given a set of discharge instructions. It is very important that you read and understand any instructions you are given. You may also need to make sure a family member or friend understands these instructions, and is willing to help you follow them.



Hospital re-admissions occur frequently when these instructions are not followed. There is a risk of:

- infections
- complications resulting from not taking medications as prescribed
- complications arising from exerting yourself too soon

## Before You Go Home

You need to think about how you will accomplish these tasks:

- How will you be transported to your home?
- Is your home difficult to access? Do you have stairs? Who will help you?
- Do you have all your medications?
- How will you receive refills on your medications?
- Are you able to change your dressings? If not, who will assist you?
- Do you have your doctor's phone number?

## Feeding and Drainage Tubes

Many patients are discharged with feeding tubes, intravenous (IV) lines and drains that will need to be managed once you're at home. You also may have a wound dressing to change. The nurses in the hospital will teach you and a family member to take care of these tubes prior to your discharge.

## Home Health Nursing



Arrangements for a home health nurse will be made prior to your discharge. This nurse will visit you to make sure:

- your wound is healing properly, and does not look infected
- check any drains or IVs that are left in place
- follow any post-op orders that are given for blood drawing, wound care and drain care
- teach a family member how to do as much of your care (that can be safely done) as possible

## *Diet After Surgery*

Many patients can't tolerate eating regular food or they aren't eating enough to keep their protein up for good wound healing. As a result, arrangements are made for you to get fed through a feeding tube or a special IV called a PICC (peripherally inserted central catheter) line. Arrangements are also made prior to your discharge with a Home Infusion company for the supplies you'll need.

## *Medications*

You'll likely be discharged from the hospital with a two to three week supply of your medications. This will include any prescription pain medication that you might need as well as medication for nausea.

Do not discontinue medications, especially antibiotics. Make sure your doctor knows every medication you are taking, and consult him/her before you begin taking any new medications.

## *Wound Care*

- Follow your wound care instructions carefully.
- Make sure any clothing or bedding that comes in contact with your wound is clean.
- Any surgical wound has the potential to become infected.
- Pay special attention to hygiene around your wound.
- Keep the area around your wound clean, and avoid touching unless your hands are freshly washed.
- Infections cause redness, fever, and swelling. Watch for these symptoms.
- Don't take baths; shower only if your doctor says it is okay to do so.
- It is normal to see clear fluid drain from a surgical wound.
- **Drainage that is foul-smelling, thick or cloudy, needs to be reported immediately.**

## *What to Expect When You Go Home*

- It is normal to feel tired after surgery.
- It is normal for open wounds to drain a clear substance when they heal.
- The area of the incision will be painful for a few days, but the pain should gradually disappear.
- Urinary catheters, if you have one, may cause some moderate discomfort.
- Diarrhea and cramps are normal and should go away in a few days.
- Constipation can also occur, depending on the medications you are taking.

## *Becoming Active After Surgery*

- Each person recovers from surgery at their own speed. Don't feel like you are not recovering quickly enough.
- It may take weeks to get your energy back, but it will return.
- Don't sit for long periods of time. It causes swelling in the legs.
- Try walking short distances, increasing the distance as you feel you can handle it.
- Don't attempt intense physical activity. Take time to heal.

## *When to Call the Doctor*

You will be given a return appointment for approximately two weeks after you get out of the hospital. Bi-weekly or monthly follow-up appointments should occur on a regular basis until you've been discharged from our care.

**However, if you experience any of the following symptoms, you need to call immediately:**

- a fever that is 101 degrees or higher
- nausea and/or vomiting
- a wound that looks infected, swollen, red, or drains excessively
- inability to tolerate food
- swelling in the legs