

INFORMATION SHEET

LAPAROSCOPIC SURGERY TIPS

31 August 2021



Laparoscopic surgery is different for everyone, and your experience will be based on the extent of your surgery, length of stay, your surgeon, how you respond to pain and your expectations. Each person also heals differently - recovery can take from a few days to several weeks.

PREPARING FOR SURGERY

You may worry about the risks, anaesthesia, pain or what the surgeon may or may not find. If you're nervous it may help to think about what in particular you are troubled by then work towards minimising that concern. Many people have found that listening to relaxation recordings before and after surgery helps to mitigate general anxiety.

BOWEL PREP

If your surgeon requests a bowel-prep the evening before surgery, here are some additional tips:

- Start drinking more water and eat more fresh fruit and vegetables the week before.
- Consider having less solid food and more liquid-type foods and less fibre the closer you get to beginning your bowel prep.
- If the taste is unpalatable, focus on getting the bowel prep drink down as quickly as possible to limit how much you taste—try drinking through a straw, pinching your nose etc.
- Stay close to the bathroom - you will need unrestricted access to the toilet.
- Wet wipes can help to soothe a sore backside, particularly unscented wipes. A soothing lotion may also be helpful.

WHAT TO PACK

- Loose fitting clothing including something without a waistband
- Bigger size underwear
- Socks or slippers
- Regular medications
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Deodorant
- Dressing gown
- Hair products (hairbrush, dry shampoo)
- Phone charger (a long cord is useful as sometimes plugs aren't close to the bed)
- Headphones
- Throat lozenges
- Lip balm
- Ask for pillow from home for the journey home to make any bumps in the road easier

Some other useful items that others have packed, particularly for public hospitals:

- Menstruation pads - the hospital does provide pads but you may prefer using your own. Note you cannot use tampons or menstrual cups following surgery and your medical team may not want you to wear period underwear as they won't be able to gauge blood loss.
- Drink bottle
- Snacks
- Make up / baby wipes for cleaning face and hands

FOLLOWING SURGERY

LENGTH OF STAY

Ask your gynaecologist before your surgery about the anticipated length of stay so you and your family can be prepared. Laparoscopy in the public hospital system may be done on an outpatient basis, but an overnight stay or longer may be required depending on the time of day you have your surgery and whether the surgery was complex or lengthy.

PAIN FOLLOWING SURGERY

If you have any pain when you come out of the anaesthesia, be sure to communicate with your medical team so this can be managed. You may also feel cold and have a sore throat from the breathing tube that is put in your throat during surgery.

You will likely feel some pain for a few days after your laparoscopy. The area around your scars may feel particularly sensitive. You may have pain in your shoulder(see below).

You are likely to be discharged with pain medication; follow the instructions and ensure you keep on top of your pain.

SHOULDER PAIN

Shoulder pain is a common side effect of a laparoscopy. This is caused by the CO2 gas used during surgery to expand your abdomen and lift it away from the internal organs, becoming trapped against the diaphragm. Some tips to alleviate this pain are:

- Walk around
- Take a warm shower
- Apply heat
- Take anti-inflammatories
- Rest in an upright position, using a pillow to help keep you propped up
- Drink peppermint tea or water
- Stay hydrated with water and fluids with electrolytes

BOWEL MOVEMENTS AND NAUSEA

Nausea is often experienced and there are medications that can be taken to help with this. Talk with your doctor and anaesthesiologist beforehand about the methods they use to minimise nausea. Natural remedies such as ginger or peppermint tea may also help with nausea.

It is also not uncommon to experience a short-term change in your bowel habits after a laparoscopy, constipation and bloating being the most common. Water, fibre-rich foods and walking around may help. A stool softener or laxative may help if needed.

BLEEDING

You may experience some light spotting or bleeding after the operation. Pads are recommended to monitor and gauge the amount of bleeding you are experiencing (menstrual cups and tampons should not be used). The length of time you experience bleeding varies but can be up to eight weeks. If it is accompanied by an odour or smelly discharge or if you have an elevated temperature, or have any other concerns, contact the surgeon's office or your GP, or head to an after-hours clinic.

INCISIONS

Generally the small cuts on your abdomen will be closed with dissolvable stitches and protected by clear dressing after your operation. It's expected the stitches will dissolve within 14 days.

It's safe for the dressing and stitches to get wet, just gently pat dry after showering.

You may feel a 'pins and needles' sensation - over time the nerves causing this sensation should heal, and this should subside.

Contact your doctor if you have a knot, swelling or redness at your incision site/s.

RECOVERY AND RECUPERATION

LENGTH OF RECOVERY

The time for recovery will depend on the complexity of your procedure including the length of time it took. You may be tired and groggy for 2-3 days following your laparoscopy. Expect your medical team to get you up and moving around as soon as you are able to. Make sure you continue to move around once you are discharged, as this will help with recovery, and reduce the risk of adhesions (scar tissue).

Returning to work will also depend on the type of job you have. If you have a job that requires sitting down for long periods of time or lifting heavy objects you may find you are not ready to return to your normal hours and tasks for several weeks (at least six for a hysterectomy).

RESTRICTIONS FOLLOWING SURGERY

You may not be able to drive following laparoscopy. Intercourse, tub bathing, douching and swimming will also be restricted for a time – discuss these with your health team before your discharge from hospital.

MENTAL WELLBEING AND POST-OP BLUES

Your attitude towards post-operative recovery is an important factor in both how your body heals and how you feel in yourself. Here are some tips:

- Recover at your own pace
- Speak to someone about your feelings
- Write down your emotions daily
- At the end of every day, reflect on something you're proud of yourself for
- Speak to your surgeon or medical team about any concerns
- Set up a post-op care plan
- Educate yourself on post-op treatment options

EXERCISE

Increase your activity levels gradually and start with gentle exercise such as walking. Expect that around six weeks after your laparoscopy you should be able to start getting back into your normal exercise routine.

FIRST MENSTRUATION

You may find that your first few periods are painful, longer, or heavier than usual. If you are concerned about the pain, or if your pain is severe, contact your doctor. If accompanied by an odour or smelly discharge or if you have an elevated temperature, or have any other concerns, contact the surgeon's office or your GP, or head to an after-hours clinic.