

Hernia Repair: After Hospital Care

This brochure provides information to help you as you recover from hernia repair surgery. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your physician or nurse.

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Activity

Try to rest on the day of your surgery. Apply an ice pack over the bandage for the next 24 hours while awake (20 minutes on, 20 minutes off). Stand up or walk a few minutes each hour while awake to lessen muscle spasms. Slowly increase your activity each day. Your activity level will be guided by how your body feels. Rest if you get tired. Feeling tired is to be expected for several weeks after surgery. Try to get a good night's sleep. It may be helpful to take your pain medication before activity and at bedtime according to dose directions.

Avoid sitting for long periods of time, which may increase your risk for blood clots. When sitting, elevate your feet.

Slowly begin light exercise, such as walking. This may cause slight discomfort, but if pain increases, stop the exercise. Avoid forceful physical activity such as sprinting, sit-ups or lifting more than 10 pounds, until you discuss this with your physician.

Most patients take up to 7 days off work after hernia surgery. This depends on your work and its demands. If your job requires lifting more than 10 pounds, you may need to be off work for a longer time. Talk with your physician for specific instructions.

Many people have questions about resuming sexual activity after surgery. If you feel well and are rested, sexual activity may be resumed. Avoid positions that strain your incision sites.

Driving

You may resume driving when you are free from incision pain, are no longer taking pain medication and believe you can react well in an emergency. Before driving, make sure that you are able to move your legs without discomfort to your incision site.

Bathing

You may shower 24 hours after surgery. Avoid soaking in a tub until your physician tells you that it is safe to do so. Avoid rubbing over the incision.

Incision care

Remove the outer bandage the day after your surgery. If you have white paper strips (Steri-Strips™) across your incision, do not take them off. Allow them to fall off on their own. If you have skin glue over your incisions, it will flake off on its own in 2 to 3 weeks. No other bandage is needed.

Keep your incision clean and dry. Let warm, soapy water run over the incision while you shower to gently clean the incision.

Some bruising at the incision can be expected. If your incision is in the lower abdomen or groin, this bruising may extend into the penis and scrotum, or vulva.

A firm, tender ridge will develop beneath the incision. It may take several weeks up to a few months for this to go away.

Excessive redness, swelling, pain or drainage from the incision may be signs of an infection. Report these signs to your physician or nurse.

Diet

You may resume eating your regular diet as it feels right to you. For the first few days, eat what was easy to digest before surgery.

Pain management

Support the incision with a small pillow when coughing or sneezing. Men should wear brief-type underwear or an athletic supporter for the first few days to reduce scrotal swelling.

Pain medication will be prescribed for you. You may need to take this medication regularly, as directed, for the first few days after surgery. This should help control your pain and allow you to be more active.

For mild discomfort, you may take acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Follow dose directions, but do not take more than 4,000 milligrams (mg) of acetaminophen in 24 hours. This total includes other medications that you may be taking.

- Many medications including narcotic pain medications have acetaminophen in them. Be sure to read labels carefully or check with your pharmacist to be sure. It is important that you look at your total intake of acetaminophen. Do not take more 4,000 mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours.
- Talk with your physician about 24-hour limits that may be right for you. Patients who are fasting or undernourished, have diabetes, are taking isoniazid or drink alcohol frequently may need to limit acetaminophen to just 2,000 to 3,000 mg per day – in divided doses. Your physician might tell you not to take acetaminophen at all.

To decrease your discomfort at the incision site, wear loose-fitting clothes for about 1 to 2 weeks after your surgery.

Pain medication can cause nausea and constipation. To help ease these effects, take pain medication with food. Drink plenty of fluids along with eating fiber or bran. If constipation persists, you may take an over-the-counter stool softener such as docusate sodium (Colace®). Take it as directed. If your bowel function does not return to normal within a week, contact your physician.

Special instructions

- Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds until your healthcare provider tells you it is OK to do so.
- Do not strain with bowel movements.

When to call your physician

Please call your physician if you have any of these symptoms:

- Temperature of 101 degrees F or higher
- Increased redness, swelling or pain around your incision
- Drainage from your incision
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation that does not go away
- Swelling, redness or pain in your leg
- Difficulty urinating
- Bleeding that does not stop

If you have any questions or concerns, please call your physician.