

# Home Care Instructions after Surgery

These are common instructions for your care after surgery. Based on your needs, your doctor may give you other instructions. **Follow the instructions given to you by your nurse or doctor.**

## **If you go home within 24 hours of surgery:**

- You must have an adult drive you home from the hospital and stay with you for 24 hours.
- Rest for the first 24 hours. You may feel dizzy, lightheaded and tired. This is common and should get better by the next day.
- **Do not** drive, operate machinery or make important personal or legal decisions or sign legal forms for 24 hours.

## **Medicines**

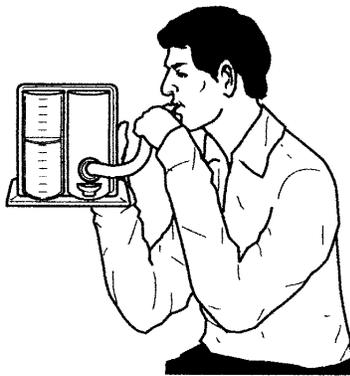
- Take your medicines as ordered.
- You may have pain after surgery. Take your pain medicines as ordered. If your pain is not managed, your recovery will take longer. It often helps to take pain medicine before activity or before the pain gets too bad. If your pain gets worse or is not controlled with medicine, call your doctor.
- If you have diabetes, your blood sugar may be higher than normal after surgery. You may need to check your sugar levels more often and report them to your doctor. If your blood sugars are high, check with your doctor to see if you should change any of your diabetes medicines.

## Activity

- You may need assistive equipment such as a walker or cane while you recover. If so, the staff will teach you how to use it.
- Avoid activity that puts stress on your incision for at least 6 weeks.
- If you had abdominal or chest surgery, support your incision with a pillow or blanket when moving or coughing.
- If you were taught how to cough and deep breathe or use an incentive spirometer in the hospital, you should continue to do this at home for the next 10 to 14 days.



**Cough and deep breathe**



**Incentive spirometer**

- Do not lift more than 10 to 15 pounds for the first 2 weeks. When lifting objects, keep your back straight and lift with your legs.
- Walking is encouraged. Gradually build up the length, time and distance you walk each day.
- Staying active and walking help prevent blood clots that can form after surgery. To prevent blood clots, your doctor may also have you do ankle pumps or other exercises, wear special stockings or take injections to thin your blood.
- You may go up and down stairs. Take them slowly and ask for help if needed.
- Do not drive, return to work, resume sexual activity, play sports or do heavy activity until allowed by your doctor.



**Ankle pumps**

## **Diet and Bowels**

- It is common to have mild nausea or vomiting after surgery. If you have nausea, start with clear liquids and light foods such as toast, rice or noodles. Then you can eat your normal diet when the nausea goes away. Avoid foods that cause you discomfort.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages for 24 hours after surgery or while you are taking prescription pain medicine.
- To help avoid constipation, eat fruits, vegetables and whole grains and drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day. Stool softeners or a mild laxative may be needed if you do not have a bowel movement within 3 days after your surgery. Call your doctor for more instructions.

## **Incision Care**

- If you have a dressing or bandage on your incision, your nurse will tell you when you can remove the dressing. If you need to keep a dressing on your incision, you will be taught how to change it.
- If you have stitches or staples on your incision, they will be removed in the doctor's office in about 7 to 14 days.
- If you have small paper-like strips, called steri-strips, on your incision, they will fall off in 7 to 10 days. The staff may remove them at your first follow up doctor's visit.
- To prevent an infection in your incision, keep it dry and clean. Each day, wash it with soap and water then gently pat it dry. Do not put lotions or powders on your incision.
- If you go home with a drain, your nurse will teach you how to care for it.
- You can shower but do not take a bath, swim or get in a hot tub until allowed by your doctor.

**Call your doctor right away if you have:**

- Increased bleeding, drainage, swelling or redness at the incision
- A fever over 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius
- Sudden, severe pain or pain not relieved by medicine
- Nausea or vomiting lasting more than 12 hours

**Call 911 right away if you have:**

- Numbness, tingling or color change of a leg or arm
- A hard time breathing
- Chest pain

**If you are not able to contact your doctor or if your symptoms are severe, call 911.**