NHS
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NHS Foundation Trust

Your discharge from the General Surgical Unit

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about leaving hospital. If, after reading this, you still have queries, then please ask to speak to your named nurse or the nurse in charge.

Pain

After leaving hospital, you are likely to still experience some pain (depending on the type of surgery you have had). You may also have pain or discomfort in your shoulder due to the gas used to inflate your abdomen during the operation. This normally disappears the following day. If you have been given painkillers or other medication to take home with you, make sure you follow the instructions. Some patients will be advised to buy 'over the counter' products such as Paracetamol or Ibuprofen. This will be discussed at your pre-op assessment appointment. If your pain increases or the painkillers seem not to work, your GP will be able to help.

Wounds

Your wound will continue to heal once you have left hospital. As part of the normal healing process, many people experience:

- Tingling, itching or numbness around the wound.
- A small, hard lumpy feeling around the wound.
- Scabs, which form to protect the healing site –it is important to leave them alone.

Please be assured these are common signs of normal healing.

Some signs, however, should be checked. It is important to seek help if:

- Your wound starts to leak fluid.
- Your wound and surrounding area becomes red, hot or swollen.
- Your wound appears to open up.

When to seek medical advice following abdominal laparoscopic surgery

As well as the above, if you have had abdominal laparoscopic surgery and experience any of the following symptoms once you have left hospital it is important that you contact either the ward from which you were discharged (if it is within 72 hours), your GP, or your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) for advice:

- Increasing abdominal pain that is not controlled by painkillers.
- Problems passing urine.
- Bloated abdomen.
- Fevers or chills.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Reduction in appetite.
- Pain, redness or swelling in either calf.

Most wounds are closed with surgical glue and do not require a dressing. If your wound has a dressing that needs changing daily, this should be arranged with your practice nurse or community nurse.

Signs of wound infection

If you are concerned that your wound is not healing as expected, it may have become infected. Wound infection is one of the more common complications after surgery and can usually be managed with careful wound care, monitoring, or a course of antibiotics. In some cases, further treatment or surgery may be required.

Signs of infection may include:

- Increasing redness around the wound
- Swelling
- Increased pain or tenderness
- Pus or discharge from the wound
- An unpleasant smell from the wound
- Fever or feeling generally unwell

If you think your wound may be infected, please seek medical advice promptly from your GP, practice nurse, NHS 111, or the surgical team caring for you.

Resting

After surgery, people often find they feel much more tired than usual. This is completely normal. Try to gradually build up the activities you do but remember to allow yourself rest periods throughout the day.

Sleep

On discharge, people often find it hard to sleep at night due to pain on moving in bed, or the change of routine. You may find it helpful to take a painkiller before going to bed, to help you settle. Many people also find that extra pillows in the bed can make you more comfortable.

Getting about

After leaving hospital, getting about may be difficult, tiring and even painful. However, it is very important to balance periods of activity with rest, to reduce the risk of complications such as deep vein thrombosis (DVTs) and chest infections. Try to avoid being completely inactive. Gently increase the amount of activities that you are doing every day until you reach your normal level of mobility.

When you first get home after your surgery you may also find it difficult to do household jobs such as vacuuming, washing up and carrying and unpacking shopping. These activities may pull on your wound or may make you feel tired and sore. It is a good idea to get family and friends to help you with these jobs for the first couple of weeks.

Bathing

It is not advisable to get your wound wet for 1-3 days after your surgery (your nurse will advise). After this you can bathe or shower. You should also avoid talcum powder or other scented

products near the wound. Adding salt to your bath is not advised. Thoroughly pat the wound dry after bathing. For surgical glue, please do not rub the glue; this will dissolve naturally.

Clothing

Tight clothes might rub and hurt your wound so it is best to wear loose comfortable clothing until your wound heals.

Eating and drinking

You may find that your appetite is poor during your recovery or you may feel bloated after eating. Try eating small amounts more often, until your normal appetite returns. A small amount of alcohol will not harm you as long as it does not interfere with any of your medications. It will tell you on the medicine container if this is likely.

Returning to work

This varies greatly depending on the operation you have had and the type of work you do. If you need a fit note / sickness certificate, please ask the nurse so that one can be arranged for you before you are discharged. If, after that time, you still do not feel ready to return to work, your GP will advise you on what to do next.

Driving

When it is safe to drive depends on the operation you have had. It is important that you do not drive until you are able to perform an emergency stop without it hurting or pulling on your wound. If you drive before this time and have an accident, your insurance may not cover you so it is advisable to check with your insurance company first.

Sexual relationships

There is no set time when it is safe to resume sexual activity. A general guide is when you feel well enough to return to work. Ask the doctor caring for you if you need more information.

Bowels

You may find it difficult to open your bowels (have a poo) during your recovery from surgery. This may be due to the surgery you have had, or because of changes in your lifestyle, diet and medication. If you do have problems, the first thing is to drink plenty of fluids. You may also need to use a mild laxative. Ask one of the nurses caring for you before leaving the hospital or ask the pharmacist at your local chemist once you have got home.

Urine

There is a slight possibility that you may develop a urine (water) infection after surgery, particularly if you have had a catheter in during your stay. To avoid this ensure that you drink plenty of fluids. Also, look out for any signs of an infection, such as pain or discomfort on passing urine, needing to go to the toilet more often than usual, or any change in the appearance or smell of the urine. If you do notice any of these signs, contact your GP immediately.

Contacting us

If you have any concerns or problems following your discharge, you can contact the ward for general advice by telephoning:

General Surgical Unit (Elective)	0118 322 7572
General Surgical Unit (Emergency)	0118 322 7535
Or email RBFT.GSU@nhs.net	
Surgical Assessment Unit / Surgical SDEC	0118 322 7541

If you have specific concerns once you have left hospital, your GP will be happy to help you.

Type of surgery I had: _____

Date of surgery: _____

My consultant's name: _____

The ward I was on: _____

My GP's tel number: _____

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Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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