Surgery - recovery and rehabilitation

Summary

- It is important to follow the advice of your healthcare professional so you can recover as quickly as possible after an operation.
- When you leave hospital, you will receive a set of instructions called a discharge or transfer of care plan.
- Don’t stop taking your medication without speaking to your doctor first. Your doctor may be able to change it, if you are not happy with it.
- If you are feeling unwell or not coping, speak with your healthcare professional, social worker or counsellor.

After every surgery there is a need for a period of recovery. For some people, this will mean intensive physical rehabilitation. For others, it might be about resting for a few days. Whatever your recovery needs, it is important to follow the advice of your hospital team or healthcare professional so you can get back to your normal life as soon as possible.

Hospital care after surgery

Your healthcare professional or hospital team will give you specific advice on the best way for you to recover, depending on the kind of surgery you had. Recovery may need months of rehabilitation, or it may be a relatively simple process that only needs you to change your normal routine for a few days.

However, even simple surgery will need you to take some follow-up action. You might have to take a course of medication, learn what to do for common complications such as bleeding or infection at the wound site, or do certain exercises at home.

Hospital discharge plan

Your healthcare professional will develop a discharge plan that will cover:

- your expected date of discharge
- your living arrangements (for example, if you live alone, whether someone can be there to help, what services you currently receive, and if you have caring commitments of your own, such as children)
- any possible restrictions on your activities, such as lifting, or driving a car
- your expected recovery and how long it should take
- any extra services you might need at home, such as wound care
- any aids and equipment you will need to help you to recover and regain your independence.

Your discharge plan should also be sent to your doctor (GP). Share this plan with any new healthcare professionals you see during the recovery process.

Understanding your medication

When leaving hospital, make sure you understand what medication you need to take, how you need to take it and how often. If you are unclear or need more information, ask a nurse or doctor at hospital for more information.

While you are in hospital as an admitted patient, any medication used as part of your treatment will be covered by Medicare as part of the hospital stay. You may have to pay for any prescriptions you fill after you leave hospital.

If you do not feel your medication is working, or it is causing unwanted side effects, speak to your doctor as soon as possible. Do not stop taking the treatment without speaking to your doctor first. Your doctor may change your dosage or be able to prescribe an alternative medication that suits you better.
Appointments and treatment after discharge

After your hospital stay, you may need to have regular check-ups with either your healthcare professional from the hospital or your local doctor. This will allow your healthcare team to monitor your recovery and general wellbeing. The nature of this follow-up care will depend on the type of surgery you have had.

Some of your follow-up care may be as an outpatient, which involves returning to the hospital for appointments to see a healthcare professional (such as a speech pathologist). Other aspects of follow-up care may be handled by your local doctor or a nurse who visits your home to dress your wounds, for example.

Recovery after surgery

How long it takes you to fully recover from your surgery will depend on many things, including:

- your age
- your health before the surgery
- the extent of your injuries
- the success of your rehabilitation
- the amount of rest you get.

For some people, recovery will be slow, while others will be back to normal within a very short time.

If your recovery is slow, be patient and follow any discharge plan you have been given, including taking medication, doing exercise and visiting with your healthcare professional.

If you are struggling with your recovery emotionally, speak with your healthcare professional, social worker or counsellor. Your physical recovery will be most effective if you are mentally prepared.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Hospital social worker
- A counsellor

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services