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ABDOMINAL OPERATIONS: WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR HOSPITAL STAY

This information helps you understand your hospital stay so you have realistic expectations for the first few days after surgery.

Following the guidelines on this sheet will help you recover from your surgery as quickly as possible and reduces the risk of some complications.

What to expect on the day of surgery:

Day 0: the afternoon and evening of surgery:

Once you wake up you should start your breathing exercises. If you do not have a stomach tube down your nose, you may be allowed to drink liquids. You will be encouraged to sit in a chair, and take a short walk.

Day 1: the first post-operative day:

If you have a stomach tube down your nose, it will probably be removed today. You will be given liquids to drink. Drink only what you can comfortably tolerate. Keep doing the breathing exercises. Get out of bed and walk at least five times. Use your pain medications to keep yourself comfortable.

Day 2: the second post-operative day:

If you still have a tube in your bladder, it will probably be taken out today. You may be allowed thicker liquids and probably solid food later this evening. Drink or eat only what you can comfortably tolerate. You may be started on pain pills. Keep walking and doing your breathing exercises.

Day 3: the third post-operative day:

If you are tolerating oral liquids, your intravenous fluids will be stopped today. You will start some solid food. You will probably be on pain pills. Keep walking and doing your exercises.

Day 4: the fourth post-operative day:

If you are doing everything from day 3, you may be going home today. If not, don't worry. These are only guidelines about how things can go. Everybody is different and sometimes it takes another day or two before you are ready for discharge.

Specific Points:

Pain Control: You will have a patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pump system for pain relief after surgery. This will make you feel comfortable and will help you do your exercises and ambulate after surgery.

Once you are taking liquids orally, you will be given oral pain medications. These work just as well as a PCA. The pills work best when used regularly, so ask for another dose before the pain gets too bad. Generally you can take the pills every four hours, if needed.

Diet: Liquids may be started the night of surgery or the following day. You may drink as much as you like. It is better not to drink too much. Avoid carbonated beverages.

When you are tolerating fluids, solid food will be started. It is important not to overeat. You may pick and choose what you like from your tray. Indeed, you will probably find that you feel better taking small frequent meals, even after you go home. If you feel bloated or nauseated, just stop drinking or eating for an hour or two before trying again. You may need a medication to relieve your nausea.

Bowel Activity: Surgery tends to paralyze the bowel for a variable period of time. This period is minimized by getting active after surgery. Standing and walking promote return of bowel function; lying in bed does not. Minimizing your use of intravenous pain medications also tends to help your bowel recover.

Breathing Exercises: These are extremely important. You should do these every hour during waking hours, taking at least ten deep breaths. This expands the small air sacs in the lungs and minimizes postoperative fever and pneumonia.

Exercise: Getting up and walking after surgery aids recovery in many ways. Much of the pain after major surgery is from muscle spasm. Getting out of bed, sitting and walking help you loosen up and actually reduce your pain. This also helps your breathing and quickens the recovery of your bowel function. Exercise will not damage your wound or the surgical area in any way.

Day of Discharge: Expect to go home on the third to fifth post-operative day. Some patients may be able to leave earlier than this and some leave later.

When you go home, expect to be able to drink freely and eat a little. You will be on oral pain medications for any residual pain or discomfort. You will be passing flatus (gas) and may have moved your bowels.

If you live alone, you may wish to make arrangements with family or friends in advance to stay with them for a few days.