

After a Hysterectomy: What you need to know

What is a hysterectomy?

A hysterectomy is a surgery where a doctor removes the uterus. The doctor often removes the cervix, too. People have hysterectomies for many reasons, such as heavy bleeding, fibroids, endometriosis, gender affirmation, or cancer. Depending on the reason for the surgery, surrounding organs like fallopian tubes and ovaries may be removed as well.

- Some hysterectomies are **laparoscopic surgeries**. This means the doctor makes 3 to 5 small incisions in the abdomen and uses a camera to guide the procedure.
- Some hysterectomies use a **vaginal approach**. This means the doctor removes the uterus through the vagina.
- Sometimes, doctors use a laparoscopic and vaginal approach together.

The surgery usually takes 1-3 hours. The length of the surgery depends on your needs.

What to expect after this surgery

You will have a general anesthetic (completely asleep) for this surgery.

- You may have an oxygen mask over your nose and mouth when you wake up.
- You may have a sore throat for a few days. This is normal and usually goes away on its own.
- If you have a laparoscopic hysterectomy, your abdomen will be full of gas during the surgery. This may make the abdomen bloated for 1-2 days. The gas can sometimes cause pain in the upper chest, shoulder, or back area after surgery.

What can I do?

- You may not feel like yourself for the first day. Rest in bed until you feel better. **DO NOT** do other activities for the rest of the day.
- If you feel nauseous, try sips of ginger ale and eat some dry crackers. If you feel like eating, try small amounts of foods that are easy to digest, like soups and cereals. Drink lots of fluids for 2-3 days, when you can.

How can I keep myself safe?

- If you go home on the day of surgery, you **MUST** have a responsible person who knows you well take you home.
- For 24 hours after surgery:
 - Someone **MUST** stay with you.
 - **DO NOT** drive, operate heavy machinery or make important decisions.
 - **DO NOT** drink alcohol or use recreational substances. The effects will add to those of the surgery medications.

Caring for yourself at home

- **Activity:** On the day of your surgery, rest. You may then slowly return to your normal activities over the next 7 days.
 - Avoid strenuous activities such as heavy lifting (over 10 pounds), exercise, and housework (vacuuming) for 6 weeks.
- **Bleeding:** You may have light vaginal bleeding. Use pads until the bleeding stops. Do not use tampons. If your incision bleeds, apply firm pressure for 10 minutes or until bleeding stops and contact your gynecologist for an assessment of your wound.
- **Sexual activity:** Do not insert anything in your vagina until your doctor tells you it is safe.

- **Hygiene:** You may see a red colour on your skin from the skin cleanser used for surgery. Leave this on for 72 hours to reduce risk of infection.
 - Always clean your hands before touching your bandages. If you have square bandages, remove them after 24 hours. Remove the surgical tape (steri-strips) after 7 days.
 - Do not go in a bathtub, hot tub, or swimming pool until your wounds are fully healed.
 - You may shower after 24 hours. Gently pat incisions dry after showers.
 - Any stitches will dissolve in 3-4 weeks.
- **Bowel function:** Constipation is common after surgery. You can take **Polyethylene Glycol (PEG)** or Metamucil as needed, with lots of water.
- **Pain:** For the first 1-2 days, you will likely have some pain. You can take pain medication. (Please read the next section.) A heating pad on your abdomen can also help.

Pain medication

- Take pain medication if you need it.
- If you have a prescription, follow the instructions from your doctor and pharmacist.
- If you do not have a prescription, you can take the following medications:

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) 1000 mg every 6 hours.

Next dose at: _____ **am/pm**

AND / OR

Ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin): 400 mg every 6 hours

Next dose at: _____ **am/pm**

OR

Naproxen 440 to 500 mg every 12 hours

Next dose at: _____ **am/pm**

NOTE: Naproxen is available without a prescription as 220 mg tablet (take 2 tablets). Prescription Naproxen comes in 500 mg tablets (take 1 tablet).

Do NOT take Naproxen with Ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) or Diclofenac (Voltaren).

Gynecologist

Doctor's Sticker Here

Follow-up visit

- Contact your gynecologist's office to make a follow up appointment. Make sure you go to the appointment. It is important to see your gynecologist after this procedure.



Contact your Gynecologist or go to Emergency if you:

- Have vaginal bleeding that is increasing, heavy (soaks 1 full pad in 1 hour), or lasts longer than 3-4 weeks.
- Have incisions with bleeding that gets heavier, does not improve with firm steady pressure, or lasts longer than 1 week.
- Have incisions with signs of infection like redness, pus-like (yellow or green) drainage, or swelling.
- Have bad-smelling vaginal discharge.
- Have a fever or chills.
- Have severe pain, and pain medication does not help.
- Have nausea or vomiting for more than 24 hours, and you cannot keep fluids down.
- Cannot pee for 8 hours after you leave the hospital.

DO NOT go to the Urgent Care Centre at BC Women's as it is ONLY for pregnant patients.