

After Your Laparotomy: What you need to know

What is a Laparotomy?

A laparotomy is a type of surgery used to access areas in your abdomen. An incision (cut) is made by your surgeon in your abdomen to perform the surgery. The cut may be vertical (up and down) or horizontal (side to side). After the surgery is finished, the incision is held closed with sutures or staples.

The surgery usually takes 2-4 hours. You might stay for 1-2 nights in hospital after a laparotomy.

What to expect after 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.
- During your operation, a small tube will be put in your bladder to help you go pee. It will stay there until you can walk to the bathroom by yourself, usually the next day.

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?

- Please have a support person to pick you up and drive you home from the hospital after you are discharged the next day.

- Driving: you **CANNOT** drive for one month after your surgery.
- After leaving the hospital:
 - Have someone stay with you for 24 hours.
- While taking strong pain medications:
 - **DO NOT** operate heavy machinery or make important decisions
 - **DO NOT** drink alcohol or use recreational substances.

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 some 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 you have discussed this with your gynecologist.
- **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 bandage.
 - Leave the abdominal bandage on for 2-3 days or as directed by gynecologist.
 - Let the surgical tape (steri-strips) fall off on their own as they help reduce scarring. Remove any remaining steri-strips after 10 days.

- Do not go in a bathtub, hot tub, or swimming pool until your gynecologist has assessed your incision.
- You may shower after 24 hours. Gently pat incisions dry after showers.
- Any sutures will dissolve in 3-4 weeks.
- Any staples will be removed after 3 days for horizontal incisions and 14 days for vertical incisions.
- **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 7-10 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 After Surgery

- Take pain medication regularly until you notice the pain improving.
- If you have a prescription, follow the instructions from your gynecologist 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

Routine 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.