

After Surgery...Frequently Asked Questions

When can I drive after surgery?

The simple answer is when you are not taking pain medication anymore. I think for most surgeries, it is good to plan on no driving for at least 3 days even if you are not taking medication. Physical discomfort is distracting and it is very important to be sure that if you drive, you are able to drive safely.

What can I eat after surgery?

Many people are not able to digest food well after surgery. Bloating, constipation, or cramps are not uncommon and are not necessarily due to pain medication. In general, I tell patients they can eat what sounds good, just plan on keeping portion sizes down for a while till things get back on track and keep some Milk of Magnesia on hand just in case you feel you are ready, but cannot have a bowel movement.

What kind of activity can I do after surgery?

For the first three days after almost any surgery, swelling is at its peak. If you minimize strenuous activity during this time, you can help minimize your swelling. After that, I tell people to let their body give them feedback about what they can or cannot handle. Some forms of exercise just need to be modified not eliminated for the first few weeks.

How do I take care of stitches?

Stitches should be kept free of bloody crust. Stitches should be treated with antibiotic ointment or Vaseline until they are removed, which should be in the first 5 days after surgery.

What can I do about nausea?

Nausea is very common after surgery. It can be nature's way of making sure you are not trying to over-exert yourself. Low blood pressure from medication used during anesthesia combined with pain medication will often lead to nausea in the first after surgery. The best way to deal with nausea is to rest and start non-narcotic pain medication (plain tylenol or ibuprofen) or ice as an alternative.

What can I do about bloating?

Bloating is a natural consequence of having surgery. Your body is not ready to resume its normal digestive habits after an operation. Pain medication will typically make digestive issues worse. I recommend Milk of Magnesia taken at night to try to reset things for the next day. If you have gone more than two days without a bowel movement, I suggest a suppository, Dulcolax.

What is the best way to make sure I heal with optimal scars?

The quality of your scar depends on many things. These include circulation and health of surrounding tissue, as well as level of activity or tension on the scar. It is good to use heavy lotions to hydrate the skin and possibly occlusive tape to help scars that are otherwise stressed as in high tension surgery such as tummy tuck. It is never advisable to stress a scar.

What should I do with my surgical garments?

I like surgical garments to stay on 24 hours a day for the first 3–7 days minimum. If they become blood-stained, you may spot treat with straight hydrogen peroxide. You may remove them for cleaning, but beware any heat as this might shrink the garment too much. After one week, or sooner in some cases, you may not need your surgical garments. If they feel comfortable, then you should use them for comfort purposes as long as you like. In general, if something feels good, it is good.

When can I take off the tapes?

I use two types of tape after surgery, and only one type of tape is suitable to leave on for long periods of time. Steritape is a flat porous tape that is used both to prevent swelling and protect scar. It will not lock in moisture as much as other tape, and for this reason, can stay clean and dry on the skin for a period of weeks. We ask you to leave it on for several weeks or at least until your first follow up appointment. Tape that is used to hold on gauze or thick foam tape used for spot compression can be removed either the following day or after 3 days depending on your procedure. In breast reduction or lift surgery, foam tape is recommended to stay in place for a full 3 day period after surgery.

When is it OK to shower?

Unless I have asked you to keep your surgical bandages dry for three days (as in many breast reduction or difficult breast revision cases) you may shower whenever you feel up to it. Remove all your bandages, leave on the steri-tape and feel free to shower with soap and light scrubbing, and careful drying with clean towels. Be careful to ensure that someone stay with you in case you feel faint during this process!

When is it OK to exercise?

I think exercise is great, BUT ONLY IF you trust yourself to know when you are over-doing things. Immediately after surgery is not a time for over-doing anything. Your body is quite excellent at telling you what is good and what is not. If you listen to it, and carefully increase your activity levels, you can keep active, improve your sleep, and potentially improve your recovery. Forced painful exercise will invariably be injurious to you and in no way worth damaging your surgical result. It is important to note that you may need 6–8 weeks to regain your stamina, not necessarily due to de-conditioning or anesthesia after-effect, but due to your body's natural response to injury (surgery) which is to force you to relax and rest by making you tired, dizzy, or occasionally faint...it's just forcing you to lie down and rest.

If you have had a BREAST AUGMENTATION I request you do not start doing any exercise involving the pectoralis major until your implants have softened completely.

When is it OK to have sex?

This answer is exactly the same as the exercise question. Start slow and figure out what works for you. If you have had labiaplasty, you need a minimum of two weeks.

When is it OK to have alcohol?

I think in general, it is a good idea to stay as drug free as possible after surgery. By this I mean, I do not recommend mixing any form of new medications with alcohol. If moderate

Why is one side more swollen than the other?

One side is always more swollen than the other, and if you didn't notice before surgery, you will notice after surgery that one side of your body is actually larger in certain ways than the other. Furthermore, healing is never the same side to side, even if you have the same surgeon and the same technique. If you have one side remarkably, largely, very very obviously more swollen than the other, than you may have some fluid that needs to be drained in order to provide you with the best healing process possible.

Can I get a refill on my pain pills?

Yes. Tummy tuck patients and some liposuction patients may want a refill. At some point it will actually make you feel better to transition to plain tylenol and ibuprofen alone. Please know that you should anticipate your refill because the office and or the pharmacy may not be available to process this request at night or on weekends.

What do I do if fluid or blood comes out of my incision?

Leaking fluid in the first 24 hours after surgery is to be expected. We place bandages over your incisions to help keep your garments clean, but sometimes these become soaked. Leakage is to be expected during this time. Leakage after a week or so after surgery typically means there is minor infection or unusual fluid accumulation. In either case, you should: 1) call the office to schedule an appointment 2) take a warm/hot shower and try to massage any or all fluid out of the opening while it stays open.

What does it mean if I have a fever after surgery?

In the first 1–3 days after surgery, fever is extremely common. Most people don't specifically recognize they are having a fever. Fever can be a somewhat normal response to surgery. If you are, in fact measuring your temperature, and realize you have a fever, the next step is to determine whether or not you actually have symptoms of infection. Do your joints ache? Do you feel nauseated? Do you feel sick? If so, you may actually have a bacterial infection. My choice is to take fluid and send it to the lab for identification asap and preferably before prescribing antibiotics. Fever after 7–10 days is less common. Please note that viral infections, urinary tract infections, and sometimes respiratory infections are all possibly sources of illness after surgery. It is never helpful or healthy for you to have indiscriminate prescription for antibiotics, so please help your surgeon determine your diagnosis prior to requesting antibiotic treatment. Please remember to involve your surgeon in any type of symptoms of infection within 30 days after surgery. If they are related to your surgery, drainage of the infection above and beyond antibiotics is key to treatment.

What should I do if I have pain in my chest or legs after surgery?

Chest/back or leg pain could be signs of a blood clot. This is an emergency. In an emergency room, you will be escorted to the front of the line if you share that you think you have a blood clot. An ultrasound can often rule this in or out and determine whether anticoagulation medication is needed to prevent the devastating consequences of many types of blood clot.

Is it normal to have numb areas after surgery?

Yes. some nerves will regrow, and some will not. This is always a problem when skin is lifted and shifted, as with most plastic surgery procedures. Sensations of itching or burning

Itching is often a sign of nerve regrowth during healing. Many patients have suggested that tapping the itchy area with soft fingertips, instead of scratching is a way to manage the urge to scratch. Itching is typically bad for surgical wound healing, due to skin trauma and infection risks.

Is it normal to have redness after surgery?

Yes. If increased pain, increasing redness, and swelling go together during the first 5–10 days, infection should be considered. In general, all forms of healing use increased circulation (redness) to deliver the type of cells and materials to the wound that are needed for the scar remodeling and healing process. This process can last up to two years for some procedures.

What should I do if I feel a lump after surgery?

Many types of fullness or lumps which you can feel under your skin are due to the extra healing that takes place around an internal stitch. If you can see rather than feel the lump, it is necessary to point this out to your surgeon in an office visit.

When should I go to the emergency room after surgery?

You should go to an emergency room if you feel that you are struggling to take a breath or have significant leg or chest/back pain. You may need treatment for a blood clot. You may also need to go to an emergency room if you feel dangerously ill, weak, on the verge of losing consciousness. Fainting spells are very common after surgery, but they typically resolve quickly with a bit of rest, lying flat on the back with legs up and a cold compress. Dehydration can cause or be caused by severe nausea. If you have been unable to keep down fluids and have not been able to urinate in a long period of time, you may need IV hydration. In general, I ask all patients who call to inquire about symptoms after surgery, “do you feel like you need to go to an emergency room?” Many times people have no difficulty discerning what is a potential life-threatening condition versus potentially common or normal reactions to surgery.

When is it OK to go in a hot tub after surgery?

Never? Hot tubs can cause skin infections and breast infections even in people who have not had surgery. I tell patients a month minimum for hot tubs. Even spending time in a bath tub or swimming pool or any form of standing water can introduce bacteria into your wound for a month after your surgery.

When should I expect my swelling to go away after surgery?

Most forms of swelling starts to subside after 3 days. Some forms of swelling can take several months to improve. Significant and visible swelling should be pointed out to your surgeon immediately. Some form of compression therapy or drainage of fluid collections needs to be initiated in order to avoid long term consequences of swelling.

When is it OK to travel after surgery?

Any surgery patient needs to keep in mind that symptoms may arise up to 30 days after surgery that could need evaluation by your surgeon for optimal treatment. At a minimum, patients are seen once in the first week and at least twice in the first month. Sitting for long periods of time in a car or plane can aggravate formation of blood clots. Most out of town