



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

What to do when I get home

Your recovery following Laparotomy,
Abdominal/Vaginal Hysterectomy and/or
Vaginal Repair

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Women's Unit

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Introduction

Going home following a Laparotomy, Abdominal/Vaginal/Hysterectomy and/or Vaginal Repair.

This advice is intended as a general guide as everyone is different. You may also receive additional information which is more specific to you, to aid your recovery.

Recovery takes time, which can leave you feeling very tired, emotionally low or tearful. This often happens during the early days and is a normal reaction. Your body needs time and energy to build new cells, to repair and to adapt emotionally.

To help you prepare for your discharge from hospital we have put together questions most commonly asked. If you feel your question has not been answered by this leaflet please ask the staff who are looking after you. It is usual to be discharged home between two and five days following a hysterectomy, depending on the type of operation performed and the speed of your recovery post-op. If your operation was straightforward with no complications you may not need any follow-up appointments at the hospital. The doctor or nurse involved in your care will advise you about that when you are discharged.

After two weeks you can gradually start to do more. By six weeks you are likely to be back to normal.

How much rest will I need?

It is normal to feel quite tired when you go home, everyone's recovery rate is different, don't expect to have lots of energy straight away. It is important to start exercising and doing light activities around the house within the first few days. When you're feeling tired lie down and rest, your body will tell you when you have done too much. Try and avoid standing for long periods.

When can I start to do exercise?

It is important that you that you go for a little walk every day; start gradually and build it up. Swimming is a very good gentle exercise to do; we recommend you can do this once any discharge has stopped. Contact sports and power sports should be avoided for at least six weeks although this will depend on your level of fitness before surgery.

Heavy lifting must be avoided for the first three months, let somebody else help you.

What about my personal hygiene?

We recommend having a shower rather than a bath. If you do not have a shower, avoid putting anything perfumed in the water such as bubble bath. With vaginal surgery it is common to have brownish vaginal discharge whilst the stitches dissolve. You may also have some fresh vaginal bleeding but it should not be heavy or contain clots, if this is the case you need to either see your GP or if you feel unwell (feverish, dizzy) go to A+E. You should use sanitary towels rather than tampons as using tampons could increase the risk of infection.

Will my bladder be affected?

Your bladder may be bruised for a while so it can be common to pass more urine than normal and you may also have an altered sensation when passing urine. This may last a few weeks. When you are passing urine try not to strain and take your time. Some women do suffer from urine infections after surgery so if you feel that you have any pain or burning sensation when you pass urine when you are back home please contact your GP.

Will my bowels be affected?

Following pelvic surgery constipation can sometimes be a problem. Straining to pass a motion can be harmful so avoid this. Exercise and a diet with plenty of roughage/high fibre and fluids will help. Drink at least eight glasses of non-sugary drinks every day to avoid constipation. If you need a laxative, we recommend something mild, like lactulose. If these remedies don't work, contact your GP.

What about my diet?

As highlighted above, a diet low in roughage can lead to constipation therefore we advise you to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. High fibre foods such as wholemeal bread and brown rice will also help. You will be less active than before your operation so try to consider what you are eating and avoid sugary, fatty foods.

Will I have a scar?

If you have a vaginal hysterectomy or vaginal repair there will not be visible scars as all the surgery will have been performed internally. Some stitch material may come away on your pad or when wiping.

With an abdominal hysterectomy you will have a scar across your tummy; usually on your bikini line. If you have had previous abdominal surgery such as a caesarean, the doctor may choose to use this incision site again. The scar will gradually fade, but it will take some time. The sensation in your skin, near the area will also be altered and can take many months to return to normal.

If you have had a Laparotomy, the surgeon may have to do a vertical cut. This is usually discussed with you at pre-assessment. As stated above, this scar can also take some time to fade.

Will I still need cervical smear tests?

When you have a hysterectomy and your cervix is removed as well you no longer require a smear. If your cervix is not removed, as in a sub-total hysterectomy, then your smear tests should be continued as normal. If you are having a hysterectomy because of abnormal smears or pre-cancerous cells on your cervix, you may need a smear from the vaginal vault depending on the final histology. Your consultant will advise you how often this needs to be.

When can I start to drive again?

You can start driving again after two to four weeks as long as you feel comfortable and confident to do so, unless your consultant has advised otherwise. You need to be able to do an emergency stop, so you can prepare by gently trying this out (and reversing) on a quiet road when you have someone with you. This way, you will have an idea of your level of comfort/discomfort. Also check with your insurance company about their policy on driving after surgery.

When can I return to work?

We usually advise returning to work six to twelve weeks after your operation. This depends on:

- How quickly you recover
- The type of operation you have had (abdominal or vaginal)
- The kind of work you do. For example, if you've had a vaginal repair and your work involves heavy lifting, then you would be off for a longer time. You might also need to look at your workload when you return to work.

Will I go through the menopause?

Symptoms such as hot flushes may develop after the operation especially if you have had your ovaries removed. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) will probably be discussed with your consultant before your operation. Your GP will usually start you on HRT if required after your surgery

How will I feel?

Many women feel quite relieved after their surgery because they have put up with a variety of problems before. You may feel that you can get on with your life without those annoying problems such as pain and bleeding. But not everyone feels the same. Some women feel tearful, depressed and lethargic and need more time to recover emotionally.

It is important to let your family and friends know you may feel this way after your surgery so that they can support you. If you're continually feeling down and depressed after your surgery seek help from your GP practice.

When can I start having sex intercourse again?

It is normal to have a low libido (sex drive) after your operation but things will gradually return to normal. You or your partner may be feeling anxious about sex being painful after your operation. Unless your doctor has advised otherwise, refrain from full penetration for about four weeks. This will allow time for everything to heal. Lubricants such as KY jelly may help. Stop if you experience any pain.

If you have any questions about this part of your recovery we would encourage you to discuss it with the Doctor before you leave hospital. If you do experience any problems when you resume sexual intercourse, you can discuss it with your GP.

Where can I find further support?

Further support can also be found at:

www.patient.co.uk (Accessed March 2021)

www.nhs.uk (Accessed March 2021)

www.rcog.org.uk (Accessed March 2021)

What are the important points to remember?

- Talk to your partner and family about how you feel about the operation.
- Try to get some gentle exercise every day.
- Avoid heavy lifting for about three months unless advised by your Consultant/ nurse.
- Rest when you feel tired.
- Have a shower or bath every day.
- Drink plenty of water.
- See your GP if you have any heavy vaginal loss, signs of urine infection and any menopausal symptoms.
- Don't go back to work until you feel ready.
- Eat a healthy, well balanced diet.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Sister, Women's Unit, the York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone 01904 722001.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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