

How to Care for Myself After Gynecologic Oncology Surgery

Division of Gynecologic Oncology



MICHIGAN MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Do I need someone to stay with me?

If you live alone, we recommend you ask a friend or relative to stay with you until around 12pm the day after you get home. It is also good to have someone who plans to check on you in person, or by phone, every day for the first week you are home. You may also need someone to shop for you or drive you to the store during your first week home.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor right away, any time of the day or night, including on weekends and holidays, if you have any of the following signs or symptoms:

- A temperature over 100.4°F (38°C)
If you don't have one, please buy a thermometer before your surgery.
- Severe pain in your abdomen or pelvis that the pain medication is not helping
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Swelling, redness, or pain in your legs
- An incision that opens
- An incision that is red or hot
- Fluid or blood leaking from an incision
- New bruising after leaving the hospital that is large or spreading. A little bit of bruising around an incision is normal.
- Nausea and vomiting
- Heavy vaginal discharge (spotting and light discharge are normal)
- Skin rash
- Unable to urinate at all
- Pain or stinging when you pass urine
- Blood or cloudiness in your urine
- Non-stop urge to pass urine, but only dribbling when you try to go
- A sense that something is wrong

What phone number should I use to call my doctor?

- During business hours between 8am and 5pm Monday - Friday, call the nurse at the gyn-onc clinic at 734-647-8902
- After hours, on weekends and holidays call (734) 936-4000 and ask for the gynecologic oncology fellow on call. There is always someone on call to help you.

How do I prevent nausea?

The best way to prevent nausea is to eat frequent small meals. It is especially important to eat something before taking pain medication.

What can I eat?

- You can eat your regular diet after you go home. Frequent small meals are easier to digest than a few big meals.
- Eat high protein foods:
 - Beans and lentils
 - Nuts, including nut-based milks
 - Eggs
 - Dairy products (Greek yogurt is very high in protein)
 - Chicken and other meats
- Eat foods that are rich in vitamins that promote healing:
 - Bell peppers
 - Dark, green, leafy vegetables like kale and spinach
 - Broccoli
 - Sweet potatoes
 - Carrots
 - Squash
 - Tomatoes
 - Citrus fruit
 - Berries

- Kiwi fruit
 - Cantaloupe
 - Apricots
 - Mango
- **If you have diabetes it is very important to keep your blood sugar under good control.** Take your medicines on time and follow your diet. Check your blood sugar every day and call the doctor who helps you manage your diabetes if your blood sugar is too high.

When should I restart taking my usual medications?

- Before you leave the hospital, ask your doctor when you can restart aspirin or any blood thinning medications.
- Otherwise, start back on your usual schedule as soon as you get home. Before you leave the hospital, your nurse will go over your discharge information with you. This will include what medicines you already took that day.

Do I need to keep using the incentive spirometer?

(You may not have received one, especially if you had outpatient surgery.)

Using the incentive spirometer while you are in bed in the hospital helps prevent the small airways in your lungs from collapsing and helps prevent you from getting pneumonia. If you stay in bed the first day you get home, continue to use the spirometer once an hour, the way you were taught. Once you are up and moving about, you will automatically breathe more deeply on your own and do not need to keep using the spirometer.

What kind of vaginal bleeding is normal?

Spotting of pink or red blood from the vagina is normal. Brown-colored discharge that gradually changes to a light yellow or cream color is also normal

and can last for up to 8 weeks. The brownish discharge is old blood and often has a strong odor, this is okay. **Call us if it becomes heavier or foul-smelling.**

When will my bladder function get back to normal?

- You received extra fluid through your I.V. while you were in the hospital, so it is normal to urinate (pee) more than usual when you first get home.
- It is normal for your bladder function to be different after surgery. You may notice a pause before your urine stream starts or that your urine stream is slower. This will gradually get better, but it may take up to 6 months before you are back to normal. Be patient, relax, and sit on the toilet a little longer.
- Drinking more water than usual will not help the bladder recover faster.

If you are doing self-catheterization:

- It is OK to wash, rinse, and reuse the catheters, but start each day with a new catheter. If you need more catheters, or any other supplies, please call a nurse using the clinic phone numbers in the section called “What phone number should I use to call my doctor?”
- Go to the bathroom at least once every 4 hours while you are awake.
- Go to the bathroom often enough so that the total of the amount you urinate plus the amount you drain with the catheter is between 8 ounces (250 ml) and 13 ounces (400 ml) each time you go.
- You can stop doing self-catheterization when the amount you urinate is 150 ml or more **and** the amount you drain from your bladder after you urinate is less than 150 ml two times in a row.

If you have an in-dwelling catheter:

- Using soap and water, wash the skin around where the catheter leaves your body and the catheter tubing two times each day. Clean the outside of the tubing tips with isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol before changing bags.

- Make sure the tube is not kinked and the bag is well below the level of your bladder at all times.
- **Call a nurse**, using the clinic phone numbers in the section called “What phone number should I use to call my doctor?” if:
 - Catheter is not draining
 - Catheter falls out
 - Urine has blood in it
 - Urine smells bad
 - Urine is cloudy
 - Your temperature is over 100.4°F (38°C).

What is a normal energy level?

It is normal to have a decreased energy level after surgery. Listen to your body. If you need to rest, do it. Give yourself permission to take it easy. Once you settle into a normal routine at home, you will find that you slowly begin to feel better. Walking around the house and taking short walks outside will help you get back to normal.

What kind of exercise can I do?

- Exercise is important for a healthy recovery. We encourage you to begin normal physical activity, like walking, within hours of surgery. Start with short walks and gradually increase the distance and length of time that you walk.
- Ask your doctor when you can start specific activities like bicycling, swimming or dancing.
- Allow your body time to heal. Do not restart a difficult exercise routine until you have had your post-op exam and your doctor says it is OK.

What activities can I do?

Listen to your body and gradually increase what you do. If you start to feel tired, sore, or in pain, lie down to rest.

- **Showers and baths:** You may shower starting 24 hours after your surgery. You may also take a bath, but do not soak for more than 10 minutes. Wash yourself and get out. Do not fill the tub above hip level. Do not get in or out of a tub without assistance. **It is very important to avoid anything that could cause you to slip and fall.**
- **Sitz bath:** You may be told to do a sitz bath. You can buy a sitz bath that sits on the toilet seat for less than \$15 at stores that sell home medical equipment such as Walgreens or Walmart. Or you can use a bath tub. If you use a tub, fill it to hip level with warm water. You can mix a tablespoon of plain Epsom Salt into the water. Do not stay in the tub for more than 10 minutes.
- **Can I douche?** No.
- **Stairs:** Walking up or down stairs is okay, but you may need some assistance at first.
- **Driving:** Do not drive while you are taking prescription opioid pain medications. After you stop them, you may drive when you are sure you can move as quickly as you need to in an emergency without hurting yourself. Before you drive, sit behind the wheel and practice slamming on the brakes and turning to look over your shoulder. If this hurts, wait and check again in a few more days.
- **Lifting:** Unless you are given other instructions, for 6 weeks after your surgery do not lift anything that you cannot easily lift with one hand.
- **Sex:** Do not resume any intercourse before your follow-up visit with your doctor. Start when your doctor says it is OK. When you do start, expect that things may feel different than before the surgery. The first few times may be uncomfortable. Go slowly and use lots of lubricant. You will get back to normal with time.

- **Travel:** It is best if you do not go far away from home before your postop visit with your doctor. If you have travel plans, talk to your doctor about this before your surgery.
- **Work:** The amount of time you will be off work after surgery depends on both your surgery and your job. This should have been discussed with your doctor before surgery. If you have any questions about this, call your doctor.
 - If you have **disability or work release forms** that need to be completed, use the clinic phone number in the section called “What phone number should I use to call my doctor?” to find out where to fax your paperwork.
 - Send the forms **at least a week before** you need them completed. If you need to talk with a representative regarding your disability paperwork, please call the clinic where you were seen and ask to be connected with the person who handles disability and work release forms for your doctor.
 - After surgery, call if you need a back to work note before your scheduled post-op visit. Use the clinic phone numbers in the section called “What phone number should I use to call my doctor?”

How do I follow-up with my doctor?

- If you have not already done so, sign up for the online Patient Portal. Benefits of the portal include quick access to test results, appointment scheduling, and messaging your doctor’s office. Instructions for how to sign up are included in your printed discharge information.
- If any organs or tissue were removed during your surgery, they were sent to the Pathology Lab for analysis. Pathology Lab results take about a week to come back. A member of your care team will call you after the tumor board discussion to go over your results and next steps.

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