After Pancreatic Surgery

Caring for Yourself at Home

Activity

You’ll probably feel very tired after surgery. Your body needs extra energy as it recovers. Be sure to get plenty of rest. After a few weeks, you can return to most normal activities. Remember:

• Don’t drive if you’re taking pain medicine.

• Don’t lift more than 10 pounds (4.5 kilos) for 6 weeks after surgery.

• Try to change your body position every 1 to 2 hours.

• It’s OK to shower with a drain. Don’t soak in a tub until the drains have been removed, and the incision is completely healed.

• Be as active as you can. Work up to walking 20 minutes a day 3 to 5 times a week.

• Most people go back to work 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. You may return sooner if you feel strong enough and have a signed note from your doctor. But take it easy—no heavy lifting, contact sports or other hard activity.

Diet and nutrition

Your care team will talk with you about eating before you leave the hospital and at discharge time. We’ll tell you what kind of food you should eat at home. Follow this diet as closely as you can. This might be hard to do, because you may not be very hungry when you first get home.

Your diet may range from a liquid diet to a modified regular diet.

Rarely, we may recommend that you get nutrition through an infusion or tube feeding.

If you have questions about your diet, contact your care team.

Follow-up care

• We’ll let you know the next steps in your follow-up plan. We’ll also discuss any further tests you might need.

• If you have a drain tube or feeding tube, we’ll discuss when it will be taken out.

• Please make sure you’re keeping a record of your drainage from your tube. Bring this record to your follow-up visit.
When to call your care team

Please call us if you notice any of these symptoms:

- A fever above 101.4 °F (38.5 °C), taken by mouth
- **Increased or growing** redness or increased drainage at the drain site (Some redness is normal.)
- You can't control your pain with pain medicine, or you suddenly have a lot more pain
- You feel sick to your stomach (nauseated) or are throwing up (vomiting)

Drain care

You might go home with one or more drains in place. Before you leave the hospital, your nurse will tell you how to take care of these drains.

See the [Jackson Pratt Drain: Home Care Instructions](#) sheet. If you don't have this document, contact your care team for drain care information.

Managing symptoms

You may have a number of symptoms after surgery. We have listed the most common symptoms below.

If you have any other symptoms—or any questions—please talk to your care team.

**Loss of appetite**

You may not be hungry, and you might lose weight before and during your treatment. Here are some tips that may help:

- Follow your personalized diet at the time of discharge. Your care team will discuss recommendations with you.
- Try to eat 5 or 6 small meals a day.
- Chew your food slowly and completely.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of clear liquids during the day. Clear liquids include water, sports drinks, clear soda pop, coffee and tea (no milk), soup broth, and fruit juice without pulp.
- Drink liquids 30 to 60 minutes **before** you eat, so you won't feel so full.
- To help you feel hungrier, try some light exercise before you eat, like taking a walk.
- Try over-the-counter drinks like Boost, Ensure or Carnation Instant Breakfast.
- If you feel sick to your stomach (nauseated), ask your care team about medicine that can help.
- Once you begin to feel full, STOP eating. It takes your body a while to realize it's had enough. If you're still hungry after 45 minutes, you can eat a little more.
**Pain**

- Pain is normal after surgery.

- You’ll get at least a 1-week prescription for pain medicine when you leave the hospital.

- Use prescribed pain medicine only as needed. You don’t need to take it on a set schedule or for a set length of time.

- Follow your care team’s directions for taking non-narcotic pain medicine (Tylenol, acetaminophen, Motrin, ibuprofen).

- Use ice packs and heat packs. We recommend 20 minutes on and 20 minutes off.

- Do light exercise, such as taking a short walk. Take rest breaks.

- If you need more pain or muscle spasm medicine, please call your clinic at least 24 hours in advance. (It takes this long to process refill orders.) Your care team also may need to check how you’re doing before giving more refills.

- If you’re worried about your pain control, contact your care team to discuss changes or other methods to try.

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**Pancreatic leaking (fistula)**

If we removed part of your pancreas, the part that remains may leak fluid.

The problem should get better on its own. You’ll have a drain in place until the fistula heals.