

Recovery and Activity Guidelines After Abdominal Surgery

Introduction

Your recovery is an important part of your surgical care. Following post-operative instructions helps reduce the risk of complications such as hernias, wound breakdown, infection, blood clots, and delayed healing.

This guide provides general activity and recovery recommendations for the first 6 weeks after abdominal surgery. Individual advice may vary depending on your procedure—always follow instructions given by your surgeon.

What You **SHOULD** Do

1. Walk Regularly

- Walking improves circulation, reduces the risk of blood clots, and helps bowel function.
- Start with short walks around your home.
- Gradually increase distance and frequency each day as tolerated.

2. Practice Deep Breathing

- Take regular deep breaths and cough gently if needed.
- Use an incentive spirometer if provided.
- This helps prevent chest infections and keeps your lungs clear.

3. Eat and Drink as Directed

- Follow your surgeon's or dietitian's instructions for diet progression.
- Maintain good hydration unless advised otherwise.
- Small, frequent meals may be better tolerated early on.

4. Take Pain Relief as Prescribed

- Take pain medication as directed, especially in the first few days.
- Adequate pain control helps you move and breathe deeply.
- Reduce and stop medications as your pain improves.

What You Should AVOID

1. No Heavy Lifting or Straining for 6 Weeks

- Avoid lifting anything heavier than 5 kg (e.g. shopping bags, vacuum cleaners, children).
- Avoid straining during bowel motions.
- Lifting too early increases the risk of hernia formation and wound breakdown.

2. Avoid Vigorous Exercise and Core Strain

- Do not run, attend the gym, or perform abdominal/core exercises.
- Avoid activities that cause pain, pulling, or strain in your abdomen.

3. Do Not Drive Until ALL of the Following Apply

- You are no longer taking opioid pain medication
- You can move freely and perform an emergency stop safely
- You feel alert and comfortable
- You have checked your car insurance requirements (some policies restrict driving after surgery)

Returning to Normal Activity

Timeframe Recommended Activity

Days 1–3 Short indoor walks, rest, deep breathing, pain control

Week 1 Gentle walking, showering, light household tasks

Weeks 2–3 Walking outdoors, light chores, short outings

Weeks 4–5 Gradual increase in daily activities, avoid heavy lifting

Week 6+ Resume heavier activity or exercise only if cleared by your surgeon

Wound Care Tips

- Keep wounds clean and dry unless advised otherwise.
- You may shower once permitted, but avoid baths, swimming, or spas until wounds are fully healed.

- Monitor for signs of infection, including:
 - Increasing redness
 - Swelling
 - Discharge or pus
 - Worsening pain
 - Fever

Report any concerns promptly to your surgeon or GP.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your surgeon, GP, or hospital urgently if you experience:

- Fever over 38°C
- Increasing or severe abdominal pain
- Persistent nausea or vomiting
- Redness, swelling, or discharge from the wound
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Calf pain or swelling (possible blood clot)
- Any sudden deterioration or symptoms that concern you

Evidence-Based Resources for Patients

- Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) – Patient Recovery Information
<https://www.surgeons.org>
- NSW Health – Recovery After Abdominal Surgery
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au>
- NHS UK – Abdominal Surgery Aftercare
<https://www.nhs.uk>
- UpToDate – Postoperative Care and Early Recovery
(Available via healthcare provider)

*This information is provided for general guidance only and does not replace individual medical advice.
Please follow instructions given by your surgeon or healthcare team.*