

# Recovery and Activity Guidelines After Abdominal Surgery

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## 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.

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## 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.
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## 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)

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## 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

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## 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.

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### 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

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### 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)

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*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.*