

## Fact Sheet

# What to expect after Hysterectomy

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The time it will take you to recover from your surgery will vary depending on the type of hysterectomy you have had and your general health before the operation.

Most women will stay in hospital for 2-4 days after an abdominal hysterectomy and 1-3 days after a laparoscopic or vaginal hysterectomy. Your surgeon will usually be able to advise you before your surgery when you will probably be able to go home.

### Will I feel much pain after my surgery?

The amount of pain you experience will depend on the type of hysterectomy you have. Remember that putting up with pain is not of any benefit for you and can actually make your recovery slower.

If we can control your pain then you can rest and recover well and may be able to leave hospital sooner. *[see fact sheet on pain management after surgery]*

### What about nausea?

Some patients will feel nauseous (sick on the stomach) after their surgery. Please tell the nurses on the ward if you feel sick so they can give you medication to help control it.

### How soon should I get up after my operation?

We encourage you to get up and move about on the first day after your surgery. The nursing staff will advise you on when to get out of bed and make sure that it is safe for you.

Getting up soon after surgery helps to prevent problems like:

- constipation (difficulty opening your bowels)
- blood clots in your legs (Deep vein Thrombosis DVT) and lung (Pulmonary Embolism PE) – some patients will also be given medicine, or wear stockings, to prevent blood clots
- Chest (lung) infections

Although we like you to get up and move about it is also important for you to get enough rest after your surgery. It is normal to feel tired after any surgery.

### What about eating and drinking?

You will be offered water to drink when you return to the main ward from the recovery ward. If you are not feeling sick on the stomach you will be given a light diet to eat.

In the days after surgery we like you to drink plenty of water and eat high fibre foods so that you do not become constipated.

### Will I have vaginal bleeding and discharge after surgery?

It is normal to have a small amount of vaginal discharge and bleeding during the first few weeks after surgery.

### Going to the toilet after surgery

Some patients will have a tube in the bladder, called a catheter, after their surgery. This is usually removed the next day and you should be able to pass urine without pain or difficulty before you go home.

It is quite common not to open your bowels in the first few days after surgery. Sometimes you may feel some 'wind pains' or cramps in the abdomen (tummy).



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The best way to settle these is to get up and move about soon after your surgery. The nursing staff can also give you peppermint water or hot peppermint tea which can help with wind pains.

Drinking enough water and eating food with high fibre content will help to get your bowels moving and prevent constipation.

### Going home from hospital

Surgery takes place in hospital but recovery mostly takes place at home. Your team is usually be able to give you a good idea of when you will be going home before you even come into hospital.

That way your family can plan when to pick you up, although occasionally the day/time may change.

To save yourself inconvenience, please make sure you take all your belongings and medications home with you.

### Also, remember to take with you

- a prescription for any medicines you might need after surgery
- a medical certificate (if you need one)
- a date for your follow up appointment with your doctor or clinic. This is usually about 6 – 8 weeks after your operation
- a discharge letter for your local doctor (GP)

### When should I seek medical advice after I have gone home from hospital?

Most women have very few problems after hysterectomy but rarely complications can happen.

If you have any of the following symptoms you should see your local doctor (GP) or your gynaecologist or contact the hospital clinic or emergency department.

- burning and stinging when you pass urine
- heavy or bad smelling vaginal discharge or bleeding
- increasing abdominal pain
- redness, pain or swelling around any skin incisions (cuts)
- a temperature (fever)
- pain, swelling, redness of your legs or any difficulty standing or walking
- Shortness of breath or chest pain

If you experience these problems you should call an ambulance

### Getting back to normal after surgery

While we like you to have plenty of rest when you get home after your operation it is also important to keep moving about and start some of your normal activities. Start slowly and build up your activities as you feel comfortable.

It is best to avoid heavy lifting (more than 3kgs – the weight of a full kettle of water) for the first few weeks of surgery. Also avoid heavy house work like vacuuming and hanging out loads of washing for the first 4 weeks after your operation.

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### What about exercise?

Gentle exercise like

- walking is good for your recovery. Slowly build up your exercise amount at a rate you feel comfortable with
- Swimming is also a good exercise but it is best to wait until any vaginal bleeding and discharge is gone
- It is best to avoid active sports or the gym until after your six week check with your doctor or hospital clinic.

Feeling very tired for quite a few weeks after a hysterectomy is normal but often takes a woman by surprise because she is otherwise often feeling much better.

A combination of adequate rest and gradually increasing activity are important for helping you get back to full strength quickly.

### When can I drive again?

You should not drive for 24 hours after an anaesthetic. (Some insurance policies have a longer waiting time – please check your policy)

You should not drive if your pain killers are affecting you or making you feel sleepy.

In general it is best not to drive until you can do all of the following comfortably without pain.

- wear a seatbelt
- be able to work all the controls
- be able to make an emergency stop
- be able to look over your shoulder to check traffic behind you.

If you have any concerns about activities after surgery please discuss these with your doctor or the staff at the hospital clinic.

### When can I travel again?

Long plane, train or car journeys can increase your chances of developing a clot in the legs (Deep vein thrombosis DVT) and lungs (Pulmonary Embolism PE).

These can be serious complications and so it is best to discuss any travel plans you may have with your doctor before your surgery.

### When can I have sex again after my hysterectomy?

Many women worry that they may not enjoy sex as much after hysterectomy or that they will find sex painful. In fact, the opposite is true. Most women find that their sex life improves after hysterectomy because the pain or bleeding or prolapse problems (and the worries they caused) that were present before the surgery are now gone.

It is important to wait for any bleeding or discharge to settle before having sex. Usually it is best to wait until you have been seen by your doctor 6 - 8 weeks after the operation so she/he can reassure you that everything is well healed.

If your ovaries have been removed you may find that you have vaginal dryness which can cause some discomfort with sex. Your doctor can prescribe estrogen hormone cream to put in the vagina which will help with this problem.

It is very uncommon to have problems with sex after a hysterectomy and you should talk with your doctor about any concerns you may have.



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### **When can I go back to work?**

The time for you to return to work will vary depending on the type of hysterectomy you have had and what sort of work you do.

It is best to discuss your individual situation with your doctor. In general women take 4-6 weeks off work to recover from a hysterectomy.

The first weeks back at work are often very tiring, much more than a woman expects. If you are able to arrange it, it is a good idea to work a shorter week or shorter days for the first week or two.

After that you will find you are back to normal.

### **How will I feel after my surgery and recovery?**

Most women (95%) say they are happy with the result of their hysterectomy because they are no longer bothered by the problems that they had before the surgery. They often feel healthier and have more energy. Occasionally women will feel sad or depressed after their surgery.

If you feel this way then it is important to talk with your GP or specialist about your feelings and ask whether discussing it with a counsellor may be helpful for you.

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**

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