

Section of Colon and Rectal Surgery

RECOVERY AFTER COLON AND RECTAL SURGERY

This information is designed to help you understand what will happen and what to expect while you are in the hospital after your surgery.

Pain control: You may have a machine called a PCA pump which will help you to control your pain after surgery. When you feel pain, push the button on the machine to deliver pain medication. You may have an epidural catheter that takes pain medication or numbing medication directly to the nerves to lessen your pain. This also helps to allow you to use less of the PCA, allows you to get up moving faster, and hopefully allows your bowels to work more quickly. After you are tolerating foods, you will be switched to oral pain medication.

**Please make sure that you alert the nursing staff if you have pain control needs that are not being met. The better pain control you have, the easier the rest of your recovery becomes.

Leg Compression: You will wake up in recovery with intermittent compression wraps on your legs that will gently squeeze your lower legs every few minutes. This will help minimize the risks of developing blood clots in your legs. These may be removed when you are up out of bed and regularly walking in the hallways of the hospital.

Diet: Most patients will be started on a liquid diet the day of or day after surgery. Take liquids as tolerated but do not "force" fluids. You will continue to receive fluids through your IV so **you** do not need to push yourself to drink. If you become nauseated, stop drinking and alert your nurse. You will be advanced to a regular diet once you tolerate liquids.

Bowel Activity: Your bowels will slow down - even go to "sleep", for a period of time after surgery. The best way to re-start your normal bowel activity is to be active as soon as possible after surgery. To do this, we will encourage you to get out of bed within the first 24 hours after surgery. Avoiding the use of too much pain medication can also help, as pain medication can be constipating.

Breathing exercises: Use your Incentive Spirometer or "IS"! This small exercise will assist you in preventing breathing related complications, such as pneumonia, after surgery. Your nurse will assist in teaching you how to use the IS. You should use your IS 10 times every hour you are awake. Doing it 2-3 times every time a TV commercial comes on is a good rule of thumb.

Activity: GET UP AND GET MOVING! This is extremely important after surgery. Do not be afraid to move in bed or cough. If you are uncomfortable, you may use a pillow to splint or cushion your incision(s), especially when you cough. Walking will help in your recovery by reducing your chance of acquiring breathing-related illnesses such as pneumonia, blood clots, and painful muscle spasms. Walking

will assist in getting your bowels moving in a healthy time-frame and may reduce your hospital stay. Please ask for assistance from the nursing staff the first time you attempt to get up after your surgery. Once you have been up and feel steady on your feet, you do not need to wait for assistance. We want you to walk as much as possible.

Discharge home: You should expect to go home as soon as your bowels are working, you are eating, your pain is controlled with oral pain medication and your vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, pulse and respirations) are normal. This may be anywhere from 2-7 days after surgery and will depend on what type of surgery you have had as well as your recovery progress. You will have home care and home placement arranged by a social worker, if needed.

Your nurse may be able to assist you in filling your prescriptions prior to discharge. If you are interested in this, let him/her know.

Complete instructions are given at the time of discharge. Your nurse will go over medications, activity recommendations, wound care and when to schedule your follow up appointments.

After your discharge you may have questions so please do not hesitate to call your physician and her/his secretary. We are available Monday through Friday 8:00am to 4:00pm. If you have an emergency after hours, call our exchange at 314-362-1242 or call 911.

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