



HSHS
St. Joseph's
Hospital | Highland



What to expect
**AFTER YOUR
SURGERY**

Your guide to recovery

Thank you

Thank you for choosing HSHS St. Joseph's Hospital Highland for your surgery. Surgery may be an unfamiliar experience and you may have questions during recovery time. Your entire health care team including your surgeon, anesthesia and nursing staff are fully committed to working with you to help you understand what to expect during recovery so you feel better and return to your normal lifestyle soon.

Please use this as a reference. It will answer questions patients often have and provides excellent information on many key aspects of recovery including **pain management, nausea, bleeding and infection**. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to call. We want to assist you.

Wishing you a quick recovery and continued health,

Your Health Care Team

Important Numbers

Hospital Main Number | (618) 651-2600

Outpatient & Surgery Department | (618) 651-2770

My Surgeon | (618) _____

My Pharmacy | (618) _____

Discharge Phone Call

After you return home, a member of your surgery team will call you to check in. We call this a Discharge Phone Call and we do this so we can touch base to see how you are feeling. It's also an opportunity for you to ask any new questions that you may have about your recovery. If we are unable to reach you and you have questions please call us at the Outpatient Surgery Department number listed above.

General Information

Everyone recovers from surgery differently. Your recovery depends on the type of surgery performed, your age, level of activity before the surgery, and your overall health. To help the recovery process and for your safety, we recommend:

- Have a family member or friend stay with you the first 24 hours after surgery.
- Don't drive or drink alcohol or sign legal documents the first 24 hours after surgery.
- Don't use heavy machinery, or operate power tools while taking pain medication.
- Don't smoke – smoking increases your chance of lung infections after surgery and decreases blood-flow slowing the healing process.
- Don't skip meals – doing so may make you feel dizzy, shaky, or anxious.
- Decrease caffeine consumption – caffeine can make you feel nervous and anxious.
- Take all medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Wash your hands often to avoid germs that cause infections.
- Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing that does not place pressure on your incision.



Pain

Pain is an uncomfortable but normal part of the healing process. By effectively managing pain, you can move around easier, breathe deeper and cough stronger which improves recovery. With less pain, you can shorten healing time and return to normal life more quickly.

- You may be given a prescription for pain medication – take pain medicine and all medications as prescribed by your doctor.
- Change your position often, get up, and move around frequently.
- Use relaxation techniques, such as controlled breathing, soft music, and guided imagery.
- Minimize distractions in your environment including bright lights, loud noise, and unpleasant smells.
- With chest or abdomen incision, use your hand or pillow to splint incision to take deep breaths, cough, or change positions. Press gently to decrease pain and reduce pulling on the incision.
- Call your doctor for any new, increased, or unrelieved pain.

Bleeding

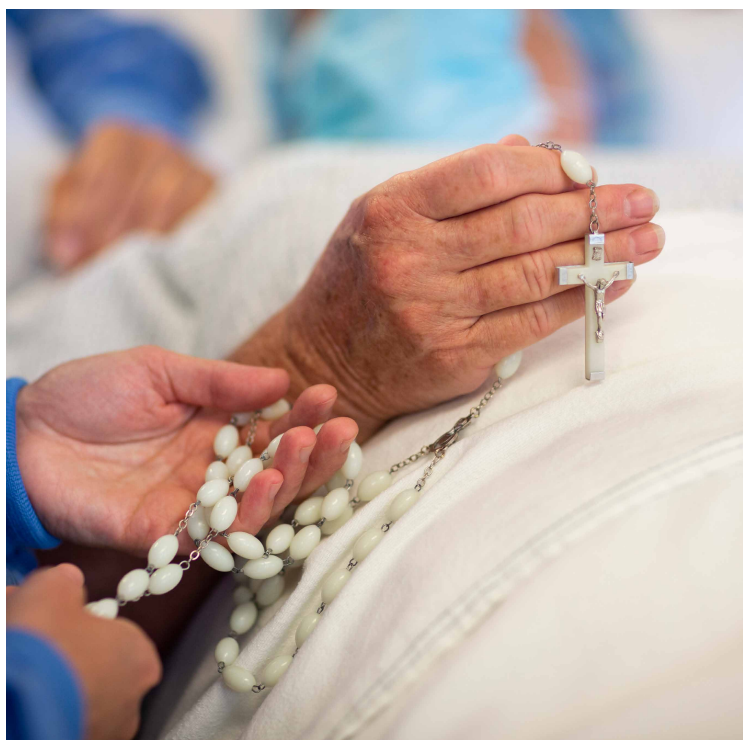
Some minor bleeding may occur after surgery. This primarily depends on the type of surgery you have. It is important to know what is normal and when you should contact your doctor. Contact your doctor if you experience:

- An increase of bleeding noted through the dressing.
- A darkened area around the incision.
- Your dressing becomes saturated with blood or drainage.

Nausea

Your surgical team works to manage post-operative nausea even before your surgery begins. However, some patients still experience a decreased appetite and upset stomach after surgery. If you experience nausea:

- Eat small meals during the day so your stomach won't feel too full.
- Limit liquids at mealtime to avoid over filling your stomach.
- Sit upright while eating.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Eat dry foods such as toast, dry cereal, or crackers.
- Avoid hot, spicy, or greasy foods.
- Avoid strong odors that can make nausea worse.
- Breathe fresh air by an open window or go outside.
- Some medicines should be taken with food or after eating – be sure to check the medicine bottle for specific directions.



Infection

Following these tips will help you care for your incision and decrease risk of infection. It is normal to have some soreness, numbness, slight swelling, redness and drainage around the incision. However, it is very important to understand the difference between normal symptoms, and signs of infection. Call your doctor if you experience:

- Separation or increased bleeding from the incision.
- Increase in warmth or swelling around the incision.
- Increased redness or tenderness around the incision.
- Thick, dark yellow drainage.
- Foul smelling drainage.
- A fever over 101 F (38 C) and /or if you have chills.



Activity

- **STOP EXERCISING IF** – you have shortness of breath, dizziness, leg cramping, or chest pain. Notify your doctor if these symptoms do not go away with rest.
- **WALK** – at least 1-2 times per day. Start with short distances and increase a little bit each day as you feel stronger.
- **LIFTING** – Ask your doctor if you can lift and bend. Do not lift, push, or pull anything heavier than 10-15 pounds unless directed by your doctor that it is ok to do so. This includes carrying children, groceries, mowing grass, and vacuuming.
- **BATHING** – do not soak in a bath until your incisions are healed. You may shower when your doctor says you may do so. Avoid hot water.
- **REST** – you need a balance of rest and exercise during your recovery. Plan to rest between activities.
- **DRESS** – wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes that do not put pressure on your incisions.
- **WORK** – your doctor will decide when you can return to work. This varies depending on the surgery performed and the type of work you do but can range from a couple of days to 6 weeks.

Care of your Incision

When you go home, you may have a dressing or bandage over your incision to keep it clean and dry. You may also have stitches, staples, or steri-strips (strips of tape). When caring for your incision:

- Don't remove your dressing until your doctor instructs you to do so.
- Wash your hands before and after touching your incision.
- When washing your incision, use a mild soap and warm water.
- Avoid hot water on your incision.
- Do not soak in a bath, whirlpool or swim until incision is healed.
- Ask doctor before applying lotions, creams or powders.
- Avoid exposing your incision to the sun, as they sunburn easily.



Blood Clots

Resting in bed for long periods of time after surgery can increase the risk of a blood clot formation known as a deep vein thrombosis or DVT. These clots usually occur in your leg veins and can be dangerous.

Contact your doctor if you experience the following symptoms:

- Pain, swelling, warmth, or redness in the affected area such as your calf or thigh.
- Hardness (like a cord) in your calf or thigh.
- Pain during walking.

Blood Thinners

Your doctor may prescribe medicine to thin your blood after surgery, and how long to take it. Blood thinners may be given as a shot or in a pill, and they will make it easier to bleed or bruise. If prescribed a blood thinner:

- Take medicine the same time every day.
- Avoid changes in Vitamin K rich food intake (dark green vegetables)
 - these foods interfere with blood thinners.
- Use a soft toothbrush; watch for bleeding from your gums and nose, or in your urine or stool
- Use an electric razor



Constipation

After surgery, constipation is a problem for many people. Pain medications, decreased activity and changes in your diet may all interfere with your normal bowel pattern. Some things you can do to prevent constipation include:

- Drink more water - you should drink at least 6-8 cups of water or other health liquid each day unless directed by your doctor.
- Prune juice - decreases constipation and softens stool.
- Medications - talk to your doctor about whether or not you may need a fiber supplement, stool softener, or laxative medication to help with the constipation.
- Contact your doctor - if your bowels have not moved within 3 days after surgery.

Lung Health

There's a higher risk of lung infection after surgery if your activity is limited and you do not breathe deeply. You are also at increased risk if you smoke. To help reduce lung infections after surgery:

- Use incentive spirometry if given one after surgery

Take deep breaths every 2 hours

- Sit upright, and place both hands over your lower rib cage.
- Take a slow deep breath through your nose.
- Hold your breath for a count of 3.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth (as if blowing out a candle).
- Repeat this exercise 10 times every 2 hours while you are awake.

Cough every 2 hours

- Take 2 slow deep breaths as instructed above.
- Inhale deeply again and hold your breath to a count of 3.
- Cough deeply 2-3 times to clear any mucus.
- Cough 2-3 times every 2 hours while you are awake.

SURVEY

You may receive a survey in the mail asking about the care and information you received. Please fill it out and return it to let us know how we did. We welcome your feedback.

MY NOTES & QUESTIONS



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