

After Your Gynecologic Surgery

What to expect during your hospital stay

This handout explains what to expect after gynecologic surgery and how to plan for your recovery.

Who will be in charge of my care in the hospital?

Your attending doctor leads a group of resident doctors who will work together to provide your care. Most times, a member of this team will see you 2 times a day. Your care team will also include nurses, a social worker, and a dietitian.

You can also talk with a spiritual care provider. Ask your nurse if you would like to speak with someone from Spiritual Care.



While you are in the hospital, your care team will include doctors, nurses, social workers, dietitians, and others.

What is a teaching hospital? How does that affect my care?

University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) trains medical students, residents, and fellows. This makes UWMC a *teaching hospital*.

- *Medical students* may observe and help in your care. They will be supervised by a medical doctor.
- *Residents* are doctors who have graduated from medical school and are receiving training in a special area of care.
- *Fellows* are doctors who have finished residency and are receiving advanced training in a special area of care.

Your attending doctor works closely with the residents and fellows to make sure you receive the best possible care. Please ask if you are not sure who someone is or how they are involved in your care.

How long do I need to stay in the hospital?

The length of your hospital stay depends on what type of surgery you have. If your surgery is:

- **A benign (non-cancerous) hysterectomy**, you will stay in the hospital about 2 days
- **A hysterectomy for cervical or endometrial cancer**, you will stay in the hospital about 2 to 3 days
- **For ovarian cancer**, you will stay in the hospital about 4 to 5 days
- **For ovarian cancer where we remove part of your bowel and as much of the cancer as possible**, you will stay in the hospital about 6 to 7 days

Each person's recovery is different. Our goal is to help you go home as soon as possible.

You must make plans to have someone drive you home when the doctor says you are ready to leave the hospital. You cannot drive yourself home.

When do I start to be active?

Getting out of bed is one of the most important things to do after your surgery. Walking helps to prevent many problems that can happen after surgery, such as lung infection (*pneumonia*), blood clots, constipation, and loss of strength.

We will help you:

- Sit up on the side of your bed the night of your surgery.
- Take deep breaths every hour using a device called an *incentive spirometer*.
- Walk in the hallways 3 to 4 times a day starting the morning after your surgery.

If you cannot walk, we will call Physical Therapy. A physical therapist will help you do exercises to regain your strength.

What will you do for my pain?

Pain control after surgery helps with recovery. Your pain must be controlled so you can get up and walk.

You will most likely be given *opioid* pain medicines given through an *intravenous* (IV) tube in your vein. You will have this IV until you can handle drinking fluids and taking medicines by mouth.

Tell your nurse if your pain is not under control.

When will I be ready to go home?

You will be ready to go home when:

- Your pain is under control.
- You can take your medicines by mouth.
- You can drink liquids and eat some food.

What kind of help will I need at home?

It is a good idea to plan ahead for help that you will need at home. Keep in mind that:

- You cannot drive for at least 2 weeks after your surgery.
- You should never drive while taking opioid pain medicines.
- You will not be able to lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds or do heavy housework for 6 weeks. (A gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds.)
- Most people get tired easily for at least 6 weeks after their surgery.
- Your pain will slowly ease, but you may need to take pain medicines for a while after you leave the hospital.

How can a social worker help?

Social workers are part of your care team, whether you are visiting a clinic or staying in the hospital. A social worker can provide:

- Counseling and support
- Help in planning for your discharge from the hospital
- Referrals to community resources and support

Tell anyone on your care team if you would like to speak with a social worker.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call 206.598.8300 and press 1 to talk with a Gynecology Oncology Nurse.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the Gynecology Resident or Fellow on call to be paged.