Activities of Daily Living After Abdominal Surgery

This handout gives guidelines to follow after abdominal surgery. Following these guidelines will protect your abdomen and your incisions and help you recover.

General Tips

- Use the guidelines in this handout to do your regular daily activities.
- At first, you may need lots of rest breaks. Plan your days to include times to rest.

Also, be sure to:

- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Get dressed every day.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Slowly resume the hobbies or social activities you enjoy.

Protect Your Abdomen

For the first 4 to 8 weeks after your surgery, or until your health care team tells you otherwise, do NOT:

- Lift, pull, or push anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. (A gallon of milk weighs 8 pounds.)
- Do any movements or exercises that use your abdominal muscles, such as sitting straight up from a lying position.

Getting Out of Bed

Use the 3-step “logroll” method to get out of bed:

- **Step 1:** Roll onto your side, with your knees bent.
- **Step 2:** Move your feet off the bed. Push your body up to a sitting position.
- **Step 3:** Sit on the side of the bed before you stand up.
Getting into Bed
1. Sit far back from the edge of the bed, near the top ⅓ of the bed.
2. Lie on your side.
3. Lift your legs onto the bed with your knees bent.
4. Roll onto your back, keep your hips and knees together as you do this, like a log.

Standing Up from a Bed, Chair, and Toilet
- **Use elevation** for sitting, if needed. You may want to put a pillow or foam cushion on your chair and use a raised toilet seat.
- Do not sit on deep or overstuffed chairs and couches.
- Your occupational therapist may recommend using a bedside commode or grab bars at home.

Getting Dressed
- Wear loose-fitting tops so that you do not twist your upper body when you put them on and take them off.
- Wearing bike shorts or other snug garments on your lower body may help support your abdominal incisions.
- If it is hard for you to reach your feet, you can use a sock aid, long-handled reacher, or a long-handled shoehorn for putting on and taking off your socks, shoes, and pants. Your occupational therapist can show you how to use these.

Showers
- Have someone help you the first few times you shower, until you feel sure about your safety.
- To avoid slipping, wear sandals, shoes, or socks with non-slip tread when you shower.
- Your occupational therapist may also recommend a shower chair or tub-transfer bench to sit on in the shower. This will make you safer and help you save your energy.

Specific Activities
For **12 weeks after surgery**, or until your health care team tells you otherwise:
- **Have someone else do chores** such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, raking, digging, mowing the lawn, or other “heavy” housework.
• **Avoid lifting.** Ask someone else to lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. This includes groceries, laundry, children, pets, or other items.

• **Do not open** tight jar lids, stuck windows, or heavy doors. Ask someone for help.

• **Do not soak** in a bathtub or hot tub, swim, or use a sauna. You can shower when your doctor tells you it is OK to.

• **Do not bowl, ski, run, ride a horse,** or do anything else that causes you to bend or twist your upper body or bounce a lot.

• **Do not drive** until you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine. These drugs slow your reaction time and make driving unsafe.

**Sexual Activity**

When you can resume sexual activity depends on your rate of recovery after surgery. Use common sense, follow your precautions, and do not be afraid to ask for advice from your doctor.

**Be Patient with Yourself**

It is normal to feel frustrated, stressed, tired, or depressed after major surgery. Some people feel they are not as sharp mentally. Do not make yourself do mentally challenging tasks. Talk with your health care provider if you have these feelings and feel overwhelmed by them.

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**Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Occupational Therapy: 206-598-4830