

Activities of Daily Living After Abdominal Surgery

This handout gives guidelines to follow after abdominal surgery. Follow these guidelines to protect your abdomen and incisions and to help your recovery.

General Tips

- Prioritize sleep. Aim to get good quality sleep every night.
- Bathe and get dressed every day.
- When you plan each day, include times to rest.
- Try to get up and move at least 1 time each hour during the day.
- Slowly resume the hobbies and social activities you enjoy.

Protect Your Abdomen

For **6 to 8 weeks** after your surgery, or until your provider tells you otherwise, follow the tips in this handout when doing daily activities:

- Do not lift, pull, or push anything that weighs more than 10 pounds (a gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds).
- Do not do any movements or exercises that use your abdominal muscles, such as sitting straight up from a lying position.
- Do not kick or push any heavy items with your feet or legs.
- Do not hold your breath or strain at any point.
- Your doctor will tell you if you need to wear an abdominal binder for all activities you do out of bed (except showering). Your occupational therapist (OT) can show you how to use it.

Getting Out of Bed

Use the 3-step “logroll” method to get out of bed for at least 6 weeks. (See images on right.)

1. **Before** you move your feet off the bed, roll onto your side, with your knees bent.
2. Move your feet off the bed. Use your arms to push your body up to a sitting position. Try to keep your abdomen relaxed.
3. Sit on the side of the bed **before** you stand up.



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Getting into Bed

1. Sit far back from the edge of the bed, near the top third of the bed.
2. Lie on your side by lowering onto your elbow, then onto your shoulder.
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

- It is harder to stand up from low, deep, or soft surfaces. Do **not** sit on low, deep, or soft chairs and couches that could be difficult to stand up from.
- Your occupational therapist (OT) may recommend using a bedside commode, raised toilet seat, or grab bars at home if your toilet is too low.

Getting Dressed

- Wear loose-fitting tops so that you do not twist your upper body when getting dressed and undressed.
- When putting on pants, socks, and shoes:
 - Sit down and bring your foot up to the level of your opposite knee instead of bending down to reach your foot.
 - If it is hard for you to reach your feet, use a sock aid, long-handled reacher, or long-handled shoehorn for putting on and taking off your socks, shoes, and pants. Your OT can show you how to use these tools.

Showers

- You can shower when your doctor tells you it is OK. Have someone help you the first few times you shower, until you feel sure about your safety.
- If stepping into a bathtub to take a shower, support yourself as you step sideways over the side of the tub. Practice this action with your OT before you go home:
 - Face the wall and place both hands on the wall.
 - Bend 1 knee with your foot behind you to move it into the tub. Do **not** lift your knee toward your chest.
- Your OT may also advise using a shower chair or tub-transfer bench when you shower. Sitting will keep you safer and help you save your energy.
- Do not take a bath, sit in a hot tub, swim, or use a sauna or steam room for at least 4 weeks, or until your care team says it is OK.

Specific Activities

For 6 to **12 weeks after surgery**, or until your care team tells you otherwise:

- **Have someone else do chores** such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, and other housework that takes effort. Avoid raking, digging, mowing the lawn, or any other yardwork.
- **Avoid lifting.** Ask someone else to lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. This includes groceries, laundry, children, pets, garbage, or other items.
- **Do not open** tight jar lids, stuck windows, or heavy doors. Ask someone for help.
- **Do not** hold your breath or bear down to do any activity.
- **Do not** use any exercise equipment, unless your therapist or doctor says it is OK.
- Do **not** do anything that makes you bend or twist your upper body or bounce a lot. This includes activities such as bowling, skiing, jogging, riding a horse, golf, tennis, yoga, boating, and driving on gravel or bumpy roads. Drive slowly over speed bumps and avoid potholes.
- **Do not drive** until you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine. These drugs slow your reaction time and make driving unsafe.
- **Before you start driving**, sit in your car and test your ability to turn your head and make the arm and leg movements required for driving. Make sure you do not have any soreness, feel guarded, or hesitate when you move your leg. If you have any of these symptoms, wait for another day and try again. If you are unsure if you are ready to start driving again, talk with your OT.

Sexual Activity

When you can resume sexual activity depends on your rate of recovery after surgery. Use your best judgment and protect your abdominal muscles. If you have any questions, ask your doctor or OT.

Be Patient with Yourself

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

Questions?

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