

Postoperative Colorectal Surgery Instructions

The Colorectal Care Center of South Florida

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Post-Operative Instructions for Patients

The post-operative period following surgery can be painful and uncomfortable. Each person is different and experiences that you hear from friends, family members or read on the Internet may be totally unlike your experience. The one thing that is certain is that after a few weeks you will feel much better than you do immediately after the surgery. Some people have a gradual recovery during which each day feels progressively better than the next. For others it will be more uneven with some good days and some bad days initially before the good outnumber the bad. You may feel great in the morning and much worse at the end of the day (or just the opposite.) Some patients report small improvement for the first couple of weeks and then all of a sudden one day they wake up feeling much better. It is expected to run out of energy during the day and feel like you need to rest or nap. It is also normal to have a poor appetite and for the food to lack taste. All of this will resolve with time, but it may take several months.

Surgical Incisions and Dressings

Your incisions may be covered with a dressing that will be removed on the day after surgery. Your wound may be closed with staples or stitches that will need to be removed. Your surgeon will determine the most appropriate timing for this. Alternatively, the incisions may be closed with absorbable stitches and surgical glue.

Bowel Movements

It's normal to feel nervous about having about a bowel movement after this surgery but don't ignore the urge to go. The more water you drink, the better. At a minimum you should have at least eight glasses of water daily. **Do not use laxatives.** Initially the stools may be only thumb size and one or two stools daily is normal. If there is no bowel movement by the third day after surgery, you can take 2-4 Dulcolax tablets and/or a Fleets enema in the green bottle (available over-the-counter.) If that still doesn't produce results, please call our office. Remember that loose stools or diarrhea can cause more harm than constipation. Stool softeners such as Surfak taken twice daily as well as bulk fiber such as Metamucil (one tablespoon taken daily each morning and evening) can be helpful. These products are available over the counter at your pharmacy.

Hygiene

As soon as you are cleared to do so by your surgeon, you may shower. It is usually ok to do so within 2 days of surgery. Let the water run down over the incisions. Do not rub or scrub them. Afterwards, if instructed to do so, you may place a dry gauze dressing or bandage over the incisions. You most likely will not be able to bath for a week or two after your surgery. You should confirm this with your surgeon.

Diet

Unless otherwise instructed, eat your regular diet including fresh or cooked fruits, vegetables and meat. Prunes and apricots can help soften stools and might be a good choice for breakfast. Dairy products and rice often cause constipation and should be avoided. Spicy and greasy/fried foods may should be kept to a minimum as they too can lead to loose stools.

Your appetite may be less than usual. This is expected and it will return to normal. In the meantime, eat what you can and try to eat multiple small meals during the day. Make sure you are drinking plenty of fluids to stay well hydrated.

Postoperative follow up

When leaving the hospital, the nurse will give you your prescriptions. Please call our office to arrange your follow up appointment (305-858-1515). Unless otherwise instructed it will generally be scheduled for 2-3 weeks after your surgery.

Medications

Unless instructed otherwise, you should resume your regular medications as prescribed by your doctors. At the time of discharge, you will be given a prescription for pain medications and any other new medications we recommend you be taking. You should follow the instructions given to you by the nurse at the time of discharge and those on the prescription bottles.

Keep track of when you are running low on medications. Prescriptions will not be refilled after hours and some medications, especially those for pain, cannot be called in to your pharmacy. So you may have to come to the office to pick up a prescription authorizing a refill.

Getting Back to Normal

Each person has a different course of recovery. When you feel like walking around, do so. If you want to get out of the house, go ahead. Light exercise is beneficial, but you should avoid heavy lifting, swimming pools, and any other form of strenuous activity for the first two weeks. You should also not drive for the first week or 2. This depends on how you feel and you certainly should not be driving if you are taking strong pain medications (narcotics) that could affect you decisions.

Getting into your regular routine can be helpful in taking your mind off the discomfort from the surgery. So when you feel up to it, which may be a few days or sometimes much longer, get back to work or your other daily activities, even if it is in a limited manner. You'll probably find that focusing your mind on something other than how you feel is a big help to the recovery process. When you're back on the job, take it easy for the first few days. Initially, you may find that you get tired easily and do not have the stamina for a full day's work. You've been through a difficult surgery and it will take some time—up to a couple of months—before you'll really feel completely healed.

When to Call Us

- If you don't have a bowel movement by the fourth day after discharge even after taking Dulcolax tablet laxative and/or a Fleets enema.
- If you notice excessive bleeding. Excessive bleeding may require immediate medical attention. You may call our office 24 hours a day and get assistance for any urgent matters.
- A fever over 101
- Increasing redness, swelling, or drainage from your incision
- A significant change in your pain level
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Severe diarrhea
- **Please note that in a truly life threatening emergency you should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency facility.**
- If you have any other questions or concerns, we're here to help.
- You may reach us 24/7 at 305-858-1515



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