

Recovering from womb cancer surgery

In this video we're going to talk about:

- The side effects you may have immediately after surgery
- What to expect in the first 24 hours after surgery
- How long recovery takes, and how it can make you feel
- And advice for promoting a smooth recovery

The road to recovery after surgery is different for everyone.

Some pain after surgery is normal and this can last for up to 6 weeks afterwards, but you will be given painkillers to help with this.

Everyone experiences pain differently and some people only need a few days of over-the counter painkillers, while others need stronger painkillers and pain relief for longer.

Constipation is also very common because of the painkillers and anaesthetic, so don't be afraid to ask for laxatives to go home with.

Numbness and discomfort around the wound and scar are very common and can last for several months after surgery.

You will most likely be discharged home with a course of injections to give yourself every day. These are called low-molecular-weight heparin, and it's important you have these to reduce your risk of blood clots.

Gently getting mobile after surgery reduces your chance of developing blood clots and chest infections. It also stimulates your bowels to work which helps avoid constipation. It's important to build up activity levels slowly and to also get plenty of rest, particularly in the first few weeks after surgery.

[Your recovery in hospital]

How long people stay in hospital after surgery varies. Your stay in hospital may vary between one night to several nights depending on the surgery you have had and how quickly you recover.

When you're asleep under anaesthetic, a catheter will be put in to rest your bladder following the operation. This is usually removed within 24 hours of your surgery and doesn't hurt.

You will also have to wear compression stockings, often for a few weeks after surgery. These are tight, like flight socks, and help reduce your chance of developing a blood clot.

Discomfort from wind is common after surgery, as your bowels are often sluggish after the operation, causing colic and trapped wind. This improves with time and gently mobilising, and drinking peppermint water or tea can help.

The gas used in keyhole surgery may also cause pain in and around the shoulder area, but this gets better after a few days.

[Your recovery after leaving hospital]

When you're discharged from hospital, you'll probably feel weak and sore, and want to get plenty of rest. This is common and things should get easier over the coming weeks. Listen to your body and gradually build up what you're doing — trying to find a balance between being gently active and resting.

As well as continued wind, it's common to experience pain, constipation, and a reduction in appetite when you go home from hospital.

Pain should improve in the days and weeks after surgery. Painkillers from the hospital as well as over the counter preparations such as paracetamol, co-codamol, and ibuprofen can help if these are safe for you to take. If you feel your pain is not being managed, or is getting worse, contact your healthcare team.

Constipation can be helped by gently mobilising, drinking plenty of fluids, gradually building up fibre rich foods such as fruit and vegetables, and taking some gentle laxatives. It can take a few weeks for your bowels to settle back into your normal routine.

Reduced appetite is often related to your bowels being sluggish. Eating small, regular meals of foods you enjoy can help, and getting some fresh air while you eat can help if you are feeling a bit sickly.

[Tips for a smooth recovery]

It's hard to predict how long it will take for any one person to recover from surgery. Not only does it depend on the type of surgery you have, but it's different for everyone. Your healthcare team will advise you how long they expect your physical recovery to take, but it may take a lot longer than this to feel back to your normal self.

However, emotional recovery often takes much longer, and some people need further treatment such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy, which can be very challenging.

Try to be kind to yourself — you're going through a lot. Everyone's recovery is different and it's important to take things at your own pace. Try to do things that you enjoy and ask for help if you need it.

Gradually build up what you do physically. If it feels comfortable, then that's usually a good sign that your activity levels are about right. Fresh air and getting outside for short periods if you can manage it can really help.

Your healthcare team will tell you when you can start to drive and return to work, but everyone's recovery is different so check with them or your GP if you're not sure.

[Where can I find further information and support?]

For further support and information, you can go to our next video, 'Preparing for your first appointment after surgery', or you can visit our website.