



Managing Pain After Surgery

It's normal to have pain after surgery. Pain is part of the healing process. It usually gets better after a few days and goes away as your body heals. There are ways to help manage pain so you can stay active and feel better.



Pain medicine

Pain medicine is often used after surgery to help you feel more comfortable. The goal is not to get rid of all the pain, but to make it easier for you to move, rest, and heal.

- Over the counter (OTC) medicine like acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) is often the first step to main control.
 - Take them on a schedule – don't wait until the pain is really bad.
- Your doctor may prescribe stronger medicines like opioids (examples: codeine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, hydrocodone, tramadol) for short-term use, right after surgery. If you are prescribed opioids:
 - Take them only as your doctor tells you to.
 - Take them on a schedule – don't wait until the pain is really bad.
 - These medicines can cause side effects and may become less helpful over time.
 - Your doctor will encourage you to take less as your pain gets better.
 - Some opioid medicines contain acetaminophen. Do not take more acetaminophen if it is already in your pain medicine. If you're not sure, ask your pharmacist.



Use distractions

- Doing things you enjoy can take your mind off the pain. Try:
 - Watching a movie or a funny show.
 - Doing a puzzle or playing a game with a family member.
 - Listening to music.
 - Doing crafts.
 - Talking with friends and family.



Think positive thoughts

Your thoughts can affect how you feel. Try to:

- Replace negative thoughts with more helpful ones.
- Let go of fear and worry.
- Avoid staying in bed all day or skipping activities because you just don't feel like it.
- These changes can help you feel better both physically and emotionally.



Eat healthy foods

Eating the right foods gives your body the fuel it needs to heal. Choose:

- Fruits and vegetables.
- Lean meats, like chicken or fish.
- Whole grains.

Try to avoid sugary snacks, processed foods, fat or greasy foods, and alcohol.



Drink plenty of water

Water helps your body heal, flush out medicines from surgery, and prevent problems like blood clots. Stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day.



Keep moving

Moving your body after surgery helps you heal faster and feel better. Lying in bed too long or sitting without moving can slow down healing. It can also increase your risk of problems like blood clots.

- Follow your surgical care team's advice about when and how to move.
- You may work with a physical or occupational therapist to help you get stronger safely.



Practice relaxation

Relaxing your body and mind can help you lower your pain. Try:

- Deep breathing exercises.
- Muscle relaxation. Think about the muscle groups in your body. Starting from one end of your body and working towards the other end of your body, relax each muscle group.
- Mindfulness. This activity teaches you to direct all your attention to where you are and what you're doing right now.

These simple tools help your body feel calm and safe, which can ease pain and improve how you feel.

Deep Breathing in Four Easy Steps
1. Take a slow, deep breath through your nose.
2. Slowly and gently allow your stomach to rise like a balloon as you use your diaphragm to inhale.
3. Hold your breath.

4. Slowly and gently release the breath through pursed lips as if you are blowing into a straw or through your nose if you find that more comfortable.

Do this for a few minutes, two or three times a day, or as needed. Aim for six breaths or less each minute.



Don't smoke

Smoking makes it harder for your body to heal. It also increases the chance of infection.

Quitting smoking before and after surgery helps your body heal faster.



Get good sleep

Sleep is important for healing and pain relief. To sleep better:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Make your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.
- Avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine later in the day.
- Limit screen time before bed. Turn off screens an hour before sleep. This includes your TV, computer or tablet, and smartphone.
- Avoid long naps. If you feel you need a nap, take it earlier in the day and limit it to 30 minutes.
- Don't exercise or bathe right before bed. Exercising and bathing both raise your body temperature. When this happens, it's harder for you to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Try relaxing activities before bed, like reading or listening to music.



Stay in touch with your surgical care team

Everyone heals in their own way. Contact your care team if your pain:

- Isn't getting better.
- Feels worse than expected.
- Changes location or becomes more intense.
- Or if you're concerned about your pain.

You may need extra support or care from other health professionals.

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