After Your Bariatric Surgery

Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- what problems to look out for
- how to care for yourself at home
- about your follow-up appointment
- who to call if you have any questions

About your bariatric surgery

You had gastric bypass surgery to help you lose weight. You either had Roux-en-Y (roo-ahn-Y) or sleeve gastrectomy surgery. Most patients can go home 2 days after surgery.

Your stomach is now a much smaller pouch. This means that the amount of food you can eat at one time is much less than normal.

The success of your surgery depends on how well you are able to:

- follow the instructions for your diet
- exercise
- change your daily habits to meet the new needs of your body
Call the Bariatric Clinic, nurse navigator, your surgeon or go to the closest emergency room if you have:

- increased pain in your abdomen (stomach area)
- increased redness, swelling, bleeding and/or pus (yellowish smelly liquid) draining from your incision (cut)
- pain that does not get better after taking your pain medicine
- increased pain in your legs or feet
- a fever higher than 38 °C or 100 °F and have chills
- nausea and vomiting for more than 12 hours that makes it hard to keep down fluids
- severe bloating

If you go to the emergency room, you must tell the staff that you recently had gastric bypass surgery.

How should I care for myself after surgery?

What can I eat and drink?

Please follow the instructions in the nutrition manual you received at your nutrition class before surgery. This manual will have instructions for what you can eat and drink. Follow the liquid diet for 2 weeks. Then move to the pureed diet for 2 weeks.

Vitamins and minerals

You can start taking your vitamins and minerals once you get home. We recommend you take these vitamin and mineral supplements (for example multivitamins, Calcium, Vitamin D, Vitamin B12) for the rest of your life. Please follow the instructions in the nutrition manual you received at your nutrition class before surgery.
Protein supplements
Start to take your protein supplements when you get home from the hospital.

Nausea and vomiting
After surgery, you may feel sick to your stomach or vomit more easily. This can happen if you eat too fast, do not chew your food well enough or eat foods that do not agree with your stomach.

If you have severe nausea and vomiting, or if you can not keep down fluids, go to the closest emergency department.

Remember:
- Take small sips and chew your food well.
- Separate your food and drinks by at least 30 minutes.
- Make sure you have a 1 month check-up appointment scheduled with the dietitian and nurse at the Bariatric Clinic.
- Contact your dietitian if you have any questions or concerns about what to eat or drink.

When can I shower?
You can shower 48 hours after your surgery, but you must wait 1 week before you are able to soak in a bathtub. Gently pat your incision dry when it gets wet after bathing.

How do I care for my wound?
Bandages are placed on the little incisions the doctor made. These bandages are called “steri-strips.” They look like little pieces of white tape.

Your incisions may look a little red and may drain a small amount of white or yellow liquid. Or, you may see small scabs. This is normal.
• The nurse will change your dressing before you go home. Keep your incisions clean and dry. The steri-strips will fall off in about 5 to 7 days. If they do not fall off, you can take them off.

• Check your incisions each day for signs of infection such as increased redness, swelling or pus (yellowish smelly liquid coming out of your wound). Tell your doctor if you notice these signs of infection.

• If you have staples or stitches to keep your incisions closed, your family doctor can remove them during your check-up appointment.

• Your incision scars may be red, dark pink or purple. These may or may not get lighter over the next year. This will depend on your skin type. To help your scars become lighter, protect your skin from the sun by using sunscreen.

How can I manage my pain?

You may have some pain from your incisions. The air that was put in your stomach to help the surgeon see better may cause pain in your shoulders and cause your stomach to feel hard. This usually gets better within the first 3 days.

• It is important to manage and control your pain as you heal. You will get a prescription for pain medicine before you go home. If you have pain, take the pain medicine before the pain becomes very bad. Take it when your pain is at number 3 or 4 on the pain scale below.

![Pain scale]

No pain  Moderate pain  Worst pain you can imagine

Keeping your pain under control will help you move and walk comfortably.
• Call the Bariatric Clinic if your pain does not:
  ▪ get better with each passing day
  ▪ decrease after taking your medicine
  ▪ go away after a few weeks

• Some of the pain medicine that your doctor prescribes can cause constipation. Drink more fluids and follow the instructions for taking medicines to prevent constipation (see page 7).

What about my medicines?

• After your surgery, you will not be able to take extended (slow) release medicines (for example, medicines that end in XR, CR, or CL). Talk to your doctor if you are taking these types of medicines.

• You can take your pills without crushing them. But, you may find it easier to swallow liquid medicine for the first 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. Talk to your pharmacist to see if your medicines are available in a liquid form.

• Your doctor may prescribe you a special medicine to prevent stomach ulcers (sores in the lining of your stomach). Please take this medicine for as long as it is prescribed. You usually do not need a refill of this prescription.

• Your doctor will tell you when to start taking your usual home medicines.

Taking medicine to prevent blood clots

After surgery you have a higher risk of getting a blood clot. A blood clot can be very dangerous. A blood clot can block a blood vessel, making it hard for blood to flow through your body. Sometimes the blood clot can get so big, it stops blood flow.

Your doctor may prescribe a blood thinner (anticoagulant) to prevent clots from happening or prevent a blood clot from getting bigger. You may need to inject this medicine for 5 days or more after surgery.
**Taking medicine to prevent constipation**

1. Take 1 Colace tablet (docusate sodium) twice a day for the first month after your surgery.

2. Take 2 Senekot tablets (sennoside) at bedtime for 5 days starting the first day you arrive home from the hospital. But, if you have diarrhea or stomach cramps, stop taking the medicine.

3. If you **still do not have a bowel movement 5 days after surgery**, take 30 millilitres of Milk of Magnesia once a day.

4. If you have taken Milk of Magnesia and still have no bowel movement in 24 hours, you may need a glycerine suppository. You should only take the suppository once.

Call your family doctor for a follow-up appointment if you still have constipation after following these steps.

**What activities can I do at home?**

You can slowly go back to doing your normal activities. Moving and walking help you recover. Staying active can prevent problems after surgery and help you lose weight. Walking also helps your blood circulation, to help your bowel movements and breathing get back to normal.

- It is important to move, so make sure you take your pain medicine as prescribed to make this easier for you.

- Start with short walks a few times a day. You will feel tired, so rest and take breaks, but try to keep on walking. As you recover, you will be able to walk farther, for a longer time, and more often each day.

- Don’t do any hard exercise (for example, shovelling snow or lifting heavy grocery bags more than 20 pounds or 9 kilograms) for 3 months. Wait until your doctor or nurse says it is safe.

- Have family members and friends help you lift and carry heavy objects when you get home.

- You may feel uncomfortable when you cough or sneeze. Holding a pillow against your stomach will help.
What about sex?

You can have sex again when you feel well enough.

It is very important that you do not get pregnant for at least 18 months after surgery. Birth control pills will not work after your surgery, so talk to your doctor about other ways to prevent pregnancy.

When can I go back to work or school?

Talk to your doctor about when you can return to work or school. Patients usually take 4 weeks off. When you return to work depends on how you feel and what your job is.

When will I have my follow-up appointment?

You will have a follow-up appointment at the Bariatric Clinic 1 month after your surgery. Please call the Bariatric Clinic if you have not received this appointment.

You will have other follow-up appointments to see different members of the Bariatric Clinic team such as:

- nurses
- dietitians
- social workers
- psychologists or psychiatrists
- doctors (as needed)

Please bring your health card (OHIP) with you to all appointments.

It is important for you to follow up with the team even if you are feeling well. Your health care team will help you prevent common problems after your surgery, such as not getting enough nutrients.
**Note:** It may be helpful for you to get a MedicAlert bracelet after your surgery. This bracelet will alert others in case of an emergency that you had gastric bypass surgery. You can also include any other allergies or health concerns.

For more information, go to:

Website: [www.medicalert.ca/Products/All](http://www.medicalert.ca/Products/All)

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**Who can I call if I have any questions?**

**Bariatric Clinic**  
East Wing – 4th floor  
Toronto Western Hospital  
399 Bathurst Street  
Toronto, Ontario  M5T 2S8  

Phone: 416 603 5800 extension 6145  
Fax: 416 603 5142  
Hours: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Nurse Navigator**  
Phone: 416 262 2691  
Email: nursenavigator.western@uhn.ca

**Dietitians**  
Phone: 416 603 5800 extension 6145

**In-Patient Unit**  
Combined Surgical Unit (CSU)  
Phone: 416 603-5830
For more information about gastric bypass surgery, go to:
Website: www.obesityhelp.com
Website: www.misgroup.ca

**Upcoming appointment:**

Clinician: ____________________________

Phone: ______________________________

Date: ________________________________

Place: Bariatric Clinic, Toronto Western Hospital
      East Wing – 4th Floor