



Going Home After Your Vulvectomy

Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

- What to expect after your surgery
- How to care for yourself at home
- When you can have sex again
- Who to contact if you have any questions

What can I expect after surgery?

You may have some side effects from the surgery. This is normal. These side effects may last for many months.

Before you go home from the hospital, you will get the date of your follow-up appointment. At that appointment, talk to your nurse or doctor about your side effects.

The side effects you experience will depend on what your doctor did during surgery. It will also depend on the amount of skin removed.

Here are some of the side effects and what you can do:

- **Numbness or tenderness of your vulvar area**

The skin removed during surgery was like padding to the area. Try sitting on pillows, a circle called a “doughnut”, or something soft to feel more comfortable. Avoid wearing tight clothing over the sensitive area. **Do not wear tight underwear.**

- **A change in direction of your urine stream or spraying urine**

You may need to adjust your position on the toilet seat while you recover.

- **Swelling of your legs**

If your lymph nodes were removed during your surgery, your legs may swell. Lymph nodes control how your fluid moves in your body.

To decrease swelling, raise your legs for several hours each day. For example, put them on 2 pillows when you are sitting.

You may also need to wear special support hose when you are not able to raise your legs. Consult your doctor if this happens.



**Call your clinical nurse specialist at
416 340 4800 extension 3674 if you notice:**

- An increase in pain
- An increase in redness around your incision (cut)
- A bad smell coming from the area
- That your skin in that area is warmer than usual
- You have a temperature of 38 °C or 100 °F
- You have pus (yellowish or white liquid) coming from your incision

These may be signs of infection.

How do I care for my vulvar area when I'm at home?

Keeping your incision (cut) clean is very important. This will help your healing and recovery. **Always wash your hands before and after your vulvar care.**

Use clean towels and washcloths each time.

- After urinating or a bowel movement, wipe yourself from front to back. This will help keep your incision clean. Before you go home from the hospital, your nurse will give you a spray bottle for cleaning yourself.
- Before you go home from the hospital, your nurse will give you a sitz bath. Take it home with you. Do a sitz bath 3 times a day and after each bowel movement. Do this until your incision is healed.
- Keep your vulvar area as dry as possible. Carefully pat dry the area after each sitz bath. You can also use a hair dryer on a cool setting. If possible, avoid wearing underwear.
- Make sure your JP drain(s) are secured to your clothes so they don't pull. Check your JP drain every day and write down the amount of fluid you have on the "Output Record Form" that the nurse gave to you after your surgery.

If your doctor thinks you may need help keeping your incisions clean, they may arrange home care nursing visits for you.

What else can I do to help my recovery?

- Avoid wearing pantyhose or girdles. They are tight and keep air from circulating in your vulvar area. This can increase the chance of infection.
- During the day, wear loose clothing and cotton underwear.
- Don't wear underwear when you go to sleep.
- Use natural soaps (glycerin) or just warm water when cleaning the vulvar area. Don't use bubble bath or perfume soaps.
- Don't use talc (baby powder) or lotion on your vulvar area.

When can I start to have sex again?

You can usually have sex about 6 to 8 weeks after your surgery. Your vulvar area has to heal completely first. Your doctor will tell you when you have healed and are ready to have sex.

Will having sex be different than before?

When you first start to have sex again, your vulvar area may feel numb or tender. This is normal. Remember that your vulva may have changed but your inside (your vagina) is the same.

If your clitoris was removed, you will have less feeling or no feeling in that area. It is important that you and your partner get pleasure from touching other areas of your body. Other sensitive areas include:

- lips
- ear lobes
- breasts
- inner thighs

Keep an open mind. Touching, cuddling and stroking can give you great pleasure.

After sexual activity, always empty your bladder (pee) and clean and dry your perineal area (the area between the anus and vagina).

Who can I call if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, please call your clinical nurse specialist at 416 340 4800 extension 3674.

For evenings, weekends and holidays, please call the 6 Peter Munk nursing station at 416 340 3521 and ask to speak with nurse in charge.