

Recovering After Surgery: Your Home Guide

Medical-Surgical • Perioperative / Pre & Post-Op

Your body needs time and the right care to heal after surgery. These steps protect your lungs, prevent blood clots, and help your incision (surgery cut) heal.

Breathe deeply

- Use your incentive spirometer (breathing device) 10 times every hour while you are awake.
- Breathe in slowly and deeply. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds, then breathe out.
- Hug a pillow against your incision when you cough.

Walk often

- Walk several times a day. Go a little farther each day.
- Move your feet and ankles when you sit or lie down.
- Drink fluids and eat protein to help you heal.

Use pain medicine safely

- Take pain medicine on schedule, before pain gets bad.
- With opioid pain pills: no alcohol, no driving, and no sleep aids unless approved.
- Opioids cause constipation. Drink fluids, eat fiber, and take your stool softener.
- Lock up your pills. Take leftovers to a drug take-back site.

Care for your incision

- Wash your hands before you touch it. Keep it clean and dry.

- Shower when your surgeon says. No baths or swimming until cleared.
- Leave the tape strips on until they fall off. Do not put lotion or powder on it.
- Do not lift more than _____ pounds until _____.

Call your provider today if you have

- Redness, swelling, warmth, or pus at your incision
- A fever of 101 F (38.3 C) or higher
- One leg that is swollen, warm, or painful
- No urine for 8 hours, or a full, painful lower belly

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Sudden shortness of breath or chest pain
- Heavy bleeding that soaks your bandage
- A wound that opens. Cover it with a clean, damp cloth.
- Very slow breathing, or you are hard to wake up

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/recovering-after-surgery/patient

© 2026 NCLEXPace.