

Robotic Prostatectomy Post-Operative Instructions

It is essential for your own safety and for the success of your surgery that you carefully read and follow these instructions.

Post-Operative Instructions:

While robotic prostatectomy is performed routinely, it is still a major surgery that will take some time and effort to recover from. Life will be harder for at least a few weeks, if not months after surgery; however it is certainly preferable to the life-threatening hardships of letting the cancer progress unchecked. So stay positive, you can get through this.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE HOSPITAL

On the Day of Surgery

- When you wake up from surgery, you will likely feel the urge to urinate, have a bowel movement, or both. You may also feel abdominal pressure or gas pain.
- You will feel the urge to urinate because your bladder is trying to expel the newly placed catheter. This feeling should go away during the middle of the night on the day of surgery.
- The abdominal and rectal walls have been manipulated during surgery and may be swollen. This can result in a feeling of abdominal pressure.
- Undergoing general anesthesia for surgery causes the bowels to "relax" and they will not be fully "awake" for a few days. As the bowels begin to return to their normal functioning, gas pain will develop. Gas pain often feels like a "heavy weight or pressure across your pelvis." The gas pain should gradually lessen with increased walking and avoiding the use of constipating pain medications such as morphine. AVOID drinking through a straw and consumption of carbonated beverages.
- You may have pain in or around your umbilical incision. After surgery, a dressing is placed over the incisions to protect it, and a suction drain is put in place through the incision to remove any excess fluid in the surgical wound. Your abdominal muscles will be sore after surgery and you will feel pain in your incision particularly with activity (such as turning) that cause increased abdominal pressure. Holding a small pillow lightly against your incision while coughing or moving will help decrease your discomfort. Please use the incentive Spirometer



(breathing machine) instead to keep your lungs clear.

- The key is to distinguish what type of pain you are having. If you are experiencing sharp pains at the incision or drain sites, then take the pain medicine. If you are feeling bloated, crampy, or a "weight across your pelvis," then stand up or walk around as the pain medicine will only serve to prolong this sensation. Try to limit the use of codeine or morphine, if possible, to help prevent increased pain and/or constipation.
- You will need to get out of bed and walk at least once or twice during the day of your surgery (once if your surgery was in the afternoon, and twice if your surgery was in the morning).
Why? Walking after surgery will decrease gas pain and help to prevent complications such as pneumonia or blood clots. *You should ask for assistance at least the first time you get out of bed and as needed, thereafter.
- You should lubricate your catheter generously with Bacitracin ointment prior to every walk. Why? The antibiotic ointment will help prevent infection and keep the catheter from sticking to your skin.
- You should turn at least once every hour while in bed and use your incentive Spirometer 10 times per hour while awake. Why? Turning and deep breathing (enhanced by using your incentive Spirometer) will help expand your lungs. This will help prevent pneumonia after surgery.

First Day After Surgery (Post-op Day 1)

- You should get out of bed and walk at least once every 1 ½ hours. Your first walk of the day should be no later than 8 a.m. Each walk should cover at least 100 yards (one lap around the hospital floor).
- You should lubricate your catheter generously with Bacitracin prior to every walk.
- You should continue to turn at least once every hour while in bed and use your incentive Spirometer 10 times per hour while awake.
- You will be taught how to care for your catheter. Why? The catheter will remain in place for 7 days to allow the surgical site time to heal.

LEAVING THE HOSPITAL

- Patients can generally be discharged from the hospital about 24 hours after surgery.
- All patients will be discharged from the hospital with a urinary catheter in place. This catheter is known as a Foley catheter and is held in place by a



balloon inside the bladder. It allows continuous drainage of the bladder into a small external collection bag which is emptied as needed. Absolutely, do not try to remove this catheter on your own. It must stay in place until you heal enough that it is no longer needed. Read further down in these instructions for more information.

- Since you will not be cleared to drive yourself, you will need someone to drive you home.

WHEN YOU GET HOME

Activity

- Please refrain from driving for 1 week after your surgery. After one week, you can resume driving and most activities. Refrain from *vigorous activity* (running, golf, exercising, horseback riding, motorcycles, bicycling) however, for **SIX** weeks after surgery to give yourself time to heal. After six weeks you may resume full activities using common sense.
- Avoid climbing stairs as a form of exercise but you may do so to get around your home.
- Avoid sitting still in one position for too long (more than 45 minutes).
- Avoid bathtubs, swimming pools, hot tubs or otherwise submerging yourself in water for as long as the catheter is in place. Showering is fine as soon as you go home.
- When you may return to work depends on your occupation and how fast you recover. Most jobs you may return to in 1-3 weeks. Use common sense.

Medication

- Most of our patients experience only minimal discomfort, and we recommend that you try Tylenol (acetaminophen) for pain first, as it usually suffices. Stronger, prescription pain killers tend to be extremely constipating and so it is better to avoid them, if possible. However, if you still have significant pain despite Tylenol, contact your physician for a prescription for stronger pain medication, which will typically be hydrocodone, codeine, or tramadol.
- Upon discharge from the hospital, you will also be prescribed an oral antibiotic, which will most likely be Cipro. You will not take these until the evening before you are scheduled to have your catheter removed. On that evening, take one pill. Then take one pill each 12 hours after that. This is twice a day for 3 days, for a total of six pills. For example, if you are going to have your catheter removed on Thursday, take your first antibiotic pill on Wednesday evening, then every 12 hours after that, ending on Saturday morning.



- You may resume any of the usual daily medications you may have been taking before surgery for other medical conditions, as soon as you are discharged. Please ask your doctor before resuming aspirin, Coumadin, Plavix, or any other blood thinners.
- At the time of discharge, you will be given a stool softener to be used for constipation. We recommend that in addition to the stool softener you also drink prune juice or milk of magnesia until you have your first bowel movement after surgery. You may continue taking the stool softener as needed to combat constipation.
- You may also be provided with a small amount of Ditropan (oxybutynin) to be used in the event you develop bladder spasms while the catheter is still inserted. Bladder spasms are typically associated with a sudden onset of lower-abdominal discomfort, a strong urge to urinate, or with sudden leakage of urine from around the catheter.

Food

- To make it easier on you immediately out of the hospital, you may initially want to stick to a bland diet. Some patients prefer a mostly liquid diet. Avoid carbonated beverages.
- Once you have had a bowel movement, you should move to a soft food diet of things like soups, scrambled eggs, toast, oatmeal etc... And then work your way back to your normal diet as you feel comfortable.
- Avoid gas-producing foods such as flour, beans, and broccoli.
- Try to spread out eating throughout the day with snacks and small meals, to avoid eating large meals at once for a few days after surgery.

Clothing

- Immediately after surgery, your abdomen will be slightly bloated so you may have trouble fitting into your regular clothes. For comfort, wear loose fitting clothing such as sweatpants or other pants with elastic (not button) waist bands. You will probably need to do so initially anyway to accommodate the catheter and collection bag.

Wound Care

- You may start showering the day of your discharge. The catheter collection bag may be removed during showering. Gently pull the colored catheter straight off of the clear plastic tubing from the bag and allow urine to run into the shower. After showering, gently pad the suture sites (do not rub or otherwise irritate



them) with a towel.

- Application of ointments (such as Neosporin) to incision sites is not recommended.
- Sutures were utilized which will dissolve on their own, there is no need to have them removed. A small amount of redness at the edges of the incision sites, as well as a small amount of clear or bloody leakage from the wound, is acceptable. Drainage of sufficient quantity to soak dressings, warmth to the touch, or redness greater than 1/2 inch from the incision should be reported to the physician.

Catheter Care

- As mentioned above, you will be discharged from the hospital with a Foley catheter in place which continuously drains urine from your bladder. It must stay in place while your anastomosis heals. Do not attempt to remove this on your own. If it should accidentally fall out, you **MUST IMMEDIATELY** notify your doctor at **678-344-8900** to have it replaced. Do NOT allow a non-urologist (even if they are a nurse or a doctor) to replace it. The catheter was carefully placed by your urologist with specific regard to your prostatectomy and cannot be replaced by just anyone.
- You will be given antibiotic ointment to lubricate the outside catheter where it enters the tip of your penis (the urethral meatus). This ointment will reduce inflammation to the urethral meatus and reduce discomfort. Apply the ointment as needed.
- You will be provided with a "stat-lock," a plastic clip which will be glued to your thigh to hold the catheter. This will be removed when your catheter is removed 1 week after surgery.
- You will be provided with two urine collection bags of different sizes, a smaller bag to be worn under your pants during the day, and a larger bag to be used at night. The smaller bag usually lasts about 3-4 hours before needing to be emptied, but of course this varies with how much liquid you consume. The larger bag should last you all night, so you do not need to wake up to empty it. Remove, empty, and exchange these two bags as needed.
- Alert the surgeon if the catheter does not drain well, or if you have any other serious problems with it.
- This catheter will stay in place for one week while you heal. Sometimes it may have to stay in place longer if you are not sufficiently healed, perhaps two weeks instead of one. You should have already scheduled a follow-up appointment for this purpose. Remember from above, that you will start taking your oral antibiotic (probably Cipro) on the evening before this day.

Regaining Urinary Control

- Most men have difficulty with urinary control after catheter removal. **You should bring an adult urinary pad (such as Depend Guards) with you the day your catheter is removed.** You should be prepared to wear these pads for a while because normal



urinary control may not be regained for 2 months from the time of your surgery.

Remember, everyone is different. Some men regain control in a week, some take six months. Don't be discouraged! Also, remember you will typically leak more standing, moving, and straining, and less when lying down and sleeping.

- Remember to do your kegel exercises regularly. The operation removed your prostate and affected your secondary urinary control mechanisms. Your external sphincter muscle must now take over all responsibility for control. It will take time and effort to strengthen this mechanism.
- Some men may continue to have mild incontinence with straining even several years after surgery. You can avoid a problem in these situations by wearing a small pad. Rarely, urinary control will be unsatisfactory even after a year. If so, something can still be done. Though rarely needed, there are techniques for restoring control such as placement of an artificial urinary sphincter.

Regaining Sexual Function

- The operation will affect sexual function in several ways, but it should not prevent you from having a fulfilling sex life when you recover. There are three components to sexual function in men: sexual drive, sensation, erection and climax (orgasm). Although these normally occur together, they actually are separate functions. Losing one does not necessarily mean you will lose the others.
- Erections occur due to a complex sequence of events involving stimulation of the cavernosal nerves and engorgement of the penis with blood. The cavernosal nerves run alongside the prostate, only millimeters away from where cancer often occurs. Prostate cancer also tends to spread along these nerves. For these reasons, although it may have been technically possible to spare the nerves, it may not have been done.
- Since the primary goal of the surgery was to rid you of cancer, one or both of these nerves may have been resected. There is a chance of recovering erections, but recovery may be slow. Nerves can heal, but very slowly. The average time to recovery for erections adequate for sexual intercourse is 6-18 months, but in some men can be even longer. While you are waiting for erections to return, a number of approaches are available for achieving erections. Ask about these in our office. If these methods are unsuccessful, a prosthesis can be placed to restore sexual function.
- Climax will not be affected by the surgery, but ejaculation (the release of fluid during orgasm) will no longer occur. You will still have the same sensations of pleasure, but no fluid will be discharged and you will have a dry ejaculation. This is because the seminal vesicles, which store fluid for ejaculation, and the vas deferens, the tubes that carry sperm to the prostate, are removed and cut during the operation. This means that you will be infertile and no longer able to father children.





If you have any questions about these instructions, please contact the office at 678-344-8900.

THINGS YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER AFTER SURGERY

- **Abdominal Distention, Constipation or Bloating:** Make sure you are taking your stool softener as directed, and drinking prune juice or milk of magnesia. If you still haven't had a bowel movement 24 hours after surgery, you may take an over the counter suppository.
- **Bladder Spasms:** Bladder spasms are typically associated with a sudden onset of lower- abdominal discomfort, a strong urge to urinate, or with sudden leakage of urine from around the catheter. Take the Ditropan (oxybutynin) given to you at the time of discharge if you encounter these problems. If they still persist despite the medication, contact your physician.
- **Bloody drainage around the Foley catheter or in the urine:** Under stress, such as during physical activity or bowel movement, this is not uncommon immediately after surgery. This should improve if you cease activity and rest for a short while. If it does not, or if you see clots in your urine, or have no urine output for two hours, contact your physician.
- **Bruising around the port sites:** This is not uncommon, and should not worry you. They will go away as you heal.
- **Lower legs/ankle swelling:** This is not abnormal and is not cause for serious concern. The swelling should go away in a week or two. Elevating your legs while sitting will help.
- **Perineal Discomfort** (pain between your rectum and scrotum): This may last for several weeks after surgery, but it should resolve on its own. If you are suffering significant pain despite pain medication, contact your physician. You might also try elevating your feet on a small stool when you have a bowel movement, applying hemorrhoid ointment, and increasing the fiber and water intake in your diet.
- **Scrotal/Penile Swelling and Bruising:** This is not abnormal and is not cause for serious concern. You might notice scrotal/penile swelling anywhere from immediately after surgery to 5 days later. It should go away on its own in a week or two. You might try elevating your scrotum on a small rolled up towel when you are sitting or lying down to reduce swelling. Also, wearing supportive underwear (briefs, not boxer shorts) is advisable.



Links to other sites that might further help with your recovery:

- Know Your Stats About Prostate Cancer: www.knowyourstats.org
- PSA Rising.com : www.psa-rising.com
- American Cancer Society : www.nci.nih.gov/cancer_information/cancer_type/prostate
- Prostate Cancer Research Institute : www.pcri.org
- SeekWellness.com-Prostate : www.seekwellness.com/incontinence/prostate_cancer.htm

*(Note: the above sites are not maintained by nor affiliated with Advanced Urology.
We are not responsible for the accuracy of their content.)*