

RECOVERY AFTER PROLAPSE SURGERY

What can I expect following a prolapse repair?

Immediately after your surgery, you may have a catheter (a tube) that drains urine from the bladder into a bag, and a pack in the vagina to prevent bleeding. Your doctor will specify how long these will need to stay in place, usually between 8 to 24 hours.

Pain/Discomfort following surgery

You may experience some pain or discomfort in the groin, vagina and lower abdomen after surgery. If you have had a sacrospinous (vaginal vault or uterine) suspension you may also experience a sharp or aching pain deep in your buttock(s). Most pain or discomfort settles within a week or two but it can sometimes be present for several weeks. Whilst in hospital you will be prescribed regular pain relief to keep you comfortable. On discharge from hospital, painkillers will be prescribed though often “over the counter painkillers” should be sufficient. Pain relief in the early post-operative period is best taken at regular intervals; don’t wait for pain to become severe before taking medication. Staying on top of any pain will help to keep you mobile and to recover more quickly. If you are experiencing severe pain that doesn’t settle after pain killers contact your doctor.

Bladder and bowel function after surgery

After a prolapse repair, you may notice that at first your urine flow is slowed and it takes longer than normal to empty your bladder. About 5 to 10% of women have difficulty emptying their bladder fully after surgery; a catheter may then be needed until swelling settles and the bladder returns to its normal function (usually after 1-2 weeks). Constipation is a common problem following surgery. Before and after your surgical procedure eat plenty of fruit and fibre and drink plenty of fluid to keep your bowel motions soft. Following surgery stool-softeners (laxatives) are prescribed to help prevent constipation, take these on a regular basis when you first go home. It is important to avoid excessive straining to pass a bowel motion as this can put pressure onto the stitches in the vagina. Some women experience burning or shooting pains in the rectum after surgery this usually settles within a few days.

Resuming activity after surgery

Following surgery, you will feel more tired than usual, therefore make sure you take plenty of rest and listen to your body. Start by walking around the house and as you feel ready increase your activity to include short daily walks. Walking is a good form of activity as it puts little strain on your surgical repair. Do not try to exercise to gain fitness, by e.g. jogging, power walking, aerobics classes etc for at least 6 weeks following surgery. It is safe to start pelvic floor exercises when you feel ready, usually 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.



What should I avoid in the 6 weeks following a prolapse repair?

- ✓ Heavy lifting and strenuous activities: you should not be carrying anything more than 5-7 kilograms. Heavy lifting puts pressure on the surgical repair and this can increase the risk of having a recurrence of the prolapse.
- ✓ Carrying small children, heavy shopping, gardening and heavy housework such as vacuuming, lifting washing baskets, moving furniture etc.
- ✓ Exercises with high impact such as aerobics, running, horse riding, gym training and heavy lifting these all put heavy forces on the pelvic floor.
- ✓ Try to stop smoking because it may delay wound healing and increases the risk of wound infection.

Bathing and Showering

You will usually feel well enough for this the day after surgery. Showering is preferable to bathing in the first 2 weeks after surgery when vaginal stitches are still present.

Can I expect any vaginal discharge following surgery?

It is normal to have some bleeding followed by a creamy white discharge that may last for up to 6 weeks as stitches in the vagina dissolve. At first the blood loss may be bright red later this usually changes to a darker reddish brown, the amount of bleeding can vary from day to day. If you experience heavy fresh red bleeding or clots requiring frequent pad changes contact your doctor. Use pads not tampons for the first 6 weeks after surgery.

When can I drive following a prolapse repair?

You should not drive if you are taking sedative painkillers or are not confident that you could perform an emergency stop if needed. As a general guide avoid driving for 7-10 days. Some insurance companies place restrictions on driving after surgery, so check your policy details.

When can I start having sexual intercourse?

It is advisable to refrain from sexual intercourse for six weeks after you have been discharged from hospital. Intercourse may be a little uncomfortable to begin with so take things slowly and gently. Using a vaginal lubricant may be helpful if you feel dry. If intercourse remain uncomfortable after 3 or 4 months of regular trying, seek advice from your doctor.

When can I return to work?

Most patients will need between two and six weeks off work. It may be advisable to try and organize a shortened working week or light duties when you first return to work, especially if you are in a job that involves standing or heavy lifting.

When should I see my doctor again? You will be seen 1 week after the procedure and then at intervals to be discussed accordingly.



Recovery tracker

Time after operation	How might I feel?	What is safe to do?	Fit to work?
1 - 2 days	You are still likely to be in hospital and may have discomfort in your lower abdomen and vagina	- Eat and drink as usual - Get out of bed and move about - Do exercises to prevent thrombosis (blood clot)	X No
3 - 7 days	- You may have mild pain and discomfort - You may feel tired and like an afternoon nap	- Getup, get dressed and move around the house - Start daily walks - Continue with your leg exercises - Start doing pelvic floor exercises	X No
1 - 2 weeks	There will be less pain as you move more and more, and you will find your energy levels returning	- Go for daily walks, gradually building up length and frequency - Build up the activities you do around the house, but avoid doing housework	X No Not just yet, usually
2 - 3 weeks	You should be pain free and feeling much stronger	- Go for daily walks, building up length and frequency to usual levels - You may still feel like a rest after each walk - Build up the activities you do around the house, but avoid heavy housework duties	✓ Yes, possibly on reduced hours or lighter duties at first
3 - 4 weeks	- You should feel stronger every day - If you haven't had any complications from surgery, you should be back to your full range of activities	- You should be back to your usual walking activities - Limit your rest periods during the day - Build up the activities you do around the house	✓ Yes, but if your work involves heavy manual handling, you are likely to need longer unless you can adjust your duties
4 - 6 weeks	If you have not had any complications from surgery, you should be back to your full range of activities	- Make sure you continue any healthy lifestyle changes - Make sure you have the correct posture for lifting - Keep doing your pelvic floor exercises	✓ Yes, but if work involves heavy manual handling, you may need 6 weeks or so off work
6 - 8 weeks	If you have not had any complications from surgery, you should be back to your full range of activities	- If you are still off work, it is possible that you are feeling anxious about returning to work and that you could do with some help from your GP or employer. Talk with them about a gradual return to work - Keep doing your pelvic floor exercises	✓ Yes, you should be able to return to work