**VAGINAL SURGERY - POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS**

This is a guide based on average surgical recovery. Surgical recovery happens on a continuum. It is OK to have better and worse days as long as you feel you are making progress Please browse through the following as this was compiled using questions we often hear.  If you are still concerned please give us a call at the office and we will be happy to help.

FAQ after your surgery

ANY PLANNING TO PRIOR TO SURGERY ?

* Prepare some light meals to have ready for your return home.
* Purchase paracetamol 500 mg and ibuprofen 200mg. (or something similar if allergic)
* Plan for someone to be home with you at least the first day and night.
* Ensure that you have someone pick you up from the hospital and drive you home after your surgery.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT IN THE FIRST 24 HRS?

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. This usually remain in place overnight to be removed first thing in the morning.

A medical certificate and or carer certificate should have been organized whilst you were in the hospital. Please let us know if you need any changes or it was missed. We can email the same to you.

# You should receive a post operation review appointment via email in the time frame advised by Dr Agarwal. Please phone our office if you haven’t received it.

## HOW TO MANAGE PAIN AFTER MY

## GYNAECOLOGIC SURGERY?

You may experience some pain or discomfort in the groin, vagina, and lower abdomen after surgery. While in the hospital you will be prescribed regular pain relief to keep you comfortable. On discharge from the 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 killer please contact us.

WHAT ABOUT VAGINAL DISCHARGE OR BLEEDING AFTER 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 bleeding is heavy (more than a menstrual period OR requires frequent pad changes) do not hesitate to contact us.

A pad may be used, but tampons should generally be avoided.

MY BLADDER AND BOWEL FUNCTION AFTER SURGERY?

After a vaginal 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 fiber and drink plenty of fluids to keep your stool soft. Following surgery stool softeners (laxatives) are often 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 after surgery.

## WHEN SHOULD I RESUME NORMAL ACTIVITY AFTER SURGERY?

Should I limit my activity?

It is normal to feel tired for a day or two after surgery, especially when general anesthesia is used. Taking a few short naps during the day or resting when you are tired may help. The risk of developing a deep vein thrombosis (clots in the veins in the legs) is increased following surgery. To minimize this risk we prescribe compression stockings and a daily blood thinning injection until you are discharged. While you are in bed, try to do simple exercises such as moving your ankles briskly in a circular motion, bending and straightening your legs a few times each hour. Avoid crossing your legs. You are advised to mobilize (under supervision) as soon as possible after the operation. Sometimes extra preventive measures may be advised, especially when your health status increases the risk of blood clot development. We will discuss this with you if necessary.

Once you are home 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, e.g. by jogging, power walking, aerobics classes, etc. for at least 6 weeks following surgery. It is safe to(re-)start pelvic floor exercises when you feel ready, usually 1 to 2 weeks after surgery

Can I take a shower or bath?

You will usually feel well enough for this the day after surgery. Showering is preferable to bathing in the first 6 weeks after surgery when vaginal stitches are still present.

Activities off limits in the first 6 weeks ?

• Heavy lifting and strenuous activities. You should not be carrying anything more than 5-7 kgs. 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. It may delay wound healing and increases the risk of wound infection.

Can I drive or travel?

After a vaginal hysterectomy you can resume driving after 4 weeks. If in doubt call your car insurance company and determine if there are any restrictions on your insurance coverage. You should be well enough to be able to react effectively in an emergency situation if needed.

We recommend avoiding long trips by car, train, or airplane during the first two weeks.

Can I have sex?

It is advisable to refrain from sexual intercourse for 6 weeks after you have been discharged from the 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 remains uncomfortable after 3 or 4 months of regular trying seek advice from your doctor.

When can I return to work?

This will depend on the type of work you do, the number of hours you work, and how you get to and from work You may return to work when pain is minimal and you are able to perform your job. Most patients require four to six weeks to recover. It may be advisable to try to organize a shortened work week or light duties when you first return to work, especially if you are in a job that involves standing or heavy lifting.

## MY DIGESTIVE SYSTEM AFTER GYNAECOLOGIC SURGERY?

What can I eat?

You can eat and drink as usual as soon as your appetite returns after the operation. Aim for a balanced diet to receive all the nutrients your body needs. It will be helpful to include foods with plenty of fiber such as muesli, prunes, and kiwi fruit and up to 2-2.5 liters of fluid intake a day to keep your bowels regular.

How do I treat constipation?

Constipation is common after surgery and usually resolves with time and/or treatment. Constipation means that you do not have a bowel movement regularly or that stools are hard or difficult to pass. Constipation can be made worse by narcotic pain medications e.g. Panadeine.

If you are vomiting in addition to constipation, please  contact us or your before using medications to treat constipation.

A common approach to constipation after surgery is to take a laxative or fiber supplement (e.g., psyllium [Metamucil]). This can be taken with a stool softener (e.g., Coloxyl). Once the bowels begin to move, you may want to continue using a stool softener (e.g., docusate [Coloxyl]) on a daily basis to keep the stools soft. This treatment may be taken for as long as needed.

What if I have diarrhea? 

Some women have a few days of soft stools after surgery, especially after taking medication for constipation. If you have watery stools more than twice a day or have blood in your stool, you should contact us.

## WHAT FOLLOW-UP DO I HAVE AFTER MY SURGERY ?

All women have a follow up appointment with Dr Agarwal after surgery. At this visit, Dr Agarwal will usually examine your pelvic area to assure the tissues are healing properly. Dr agarwal will discuss results from histology.

This appointment is a good opportunity to ask questions about the procedure you had, for example:

* Were there any abnormal findings?
* Was my cervix removed?
* Were my ovaries removed? Which ovary was operated on or removed?
* Was mesh or any other permanent surgical material used?
* Do I need a cervical screening test ?

A copy of this information, including a copy of the histology will be sent to your GP.

## **WHEN DO I CALL** ?

You should call if you experience any of the following:

\*Please present there and advise the staff there that you are Dr Agarwal’s private patient!

* Abdominal pain or bloating that is severe, lasts for 3 hours or more, and is not relieved after taking the recommended dose of pain medication
* Shortness of breath or chest pain
* Vaginal bleeding that is heavy (heavier than a menstrual period or completely soaks a large sanitary pad) and continues for more than one hour
* Nausea or vomiting that continues for more than one day or that make it impossible to eat or drink
* Fever greater than 38ºC (measure your temperature with a thermometer)
* Swelling in an extremity (leg or arm) that is much greater on one side than the other
* Foul-smelling, green, or dark yellow vaginal discharge
* Inability to empty the bladder or burning with urination
* Inability to pass wind or move bowel for three days
* Loose or watery stools two or more times a day OR bloody stools.
* You think something is not right and you feel you need to tell or check with someone.

**POST SURGERY CONTACT PATHWAY:**

# IN A LIFE THREATENING EMERGENCY PLEASE CALL 000

**YOU CAN CONTACT**

* Dr Anju Agarwal, Specialists on Honeysuckle– **03 54432276** (office hours)
* St. John of God Hospital: **03 5434342*3*** (maternity ward)
* St. John of God Hospital: **03 54343434** (main switch- ask to speak to nursing supervisor)
* Your local GP
* Nearest emergency department.