

Going Home

You may be feeling anxious about going home following surgery but help is available. This factsheet contains some advice that may help your transition from hospital to home and provide advice that may reassure you and guide you through your recovery period. If you have any questions or concerns about this or any other aspect of bowel cancer, please call our **Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on freephone 0800 8 40 35 40**.

It is usual to remain in hospital for 7-10 days after bowel surgery. If you have had laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery the stay is likely to be, on average, 2.6 days shorter than for patients who have had conventional surgery.

To ensure the best possible recovery after your surgery, your discharge should be planned ahead of you going home. This may include referral to the community nursing team or a stoma nurse, if necessary, or it might involve the organisation of other services such as personal care or meals on wheels.

Activities

For the first 6-8 weeks after discharge you should restrict your physical activities. Swimming and vigorous exercise should be avoided until the wound is completely healed. Some people find that increasing their physical activities a little each day helps boost morale. Listen to your body and don't do activities that cause pain or discomfort. Try to balance rest with sufficient exercise to regain strength. This may be in the form of a gentle walk, increasing the distance each day. If possible, arrange help with housework and shopping. Lifting heavy items (including children and shopping bags) and vacuuming should be avoided for at least 10-12 weeks. You may find that your libido (sex drive) has decreased after surgery. This is not unusual and should return in time. You can start to have sex again when you feel comfortable doing so.

Eating

Many people will find that their bowel movements are more frequent and/or looser after surgery and this can sometimes take time to settle, especially if you have a stoma. Adjusting your diet by eating low fibre food for a period may make this more manageable. Our factsheet Eating after Bowel Surgery gives more detailed advice on this. Generally, there are no hard and fast rules about what you should or should not eat and 'everything in moderation' is good to bear in mind. If you are going to have chemotherapy, do check with your oncologist before taking any vitamins or herbal supplements.

Fatigue

Ensure you get plenty of rest. You may be surprised how tired you feel but this is usual after surgery. Build up your activities slowly. If you have family or friends on hand, enlist their help with housework and shopping etc.

The British Red Cross has information about a wide variety of aids for daily living and medical equipment. Many of these are geared towards making everyday tasks both easier and safer.

Stomas

Your stoma nurse can be contacted if you need help or support with your stoma, if you have one. Our factsheet [Information on Stomas](#) provides further details.

Driving

You should avoid driving for at least 6 weeks. To begin again safely you should be able to turn your upper body and have the strength to apply the emergency brake at speed. You should see your GP and check with your insurance company before you start driving again.

Work

When to return to work is an individual decision and will depend on your health and personal situation. You can expect to be off work for around 2-3 months post-operatively. Keep your employer informed of your progress and consider returning to work on a part-time basis to begin with. You may be able to return to work sooner if you have had laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery.

Holidays

Check with your GP first. Arrange adequate travel insurance. It can be difficult getting cover, but we have details of companies who are happy to insure, so please call our Bowel Cancer Advisory Service for further information.

Treatment

Further treatment with chemotherapy may be needed. This will usually commence around 6-8 weeks after surgery, although it may be sooner. Please see our [Chemotherapy for Bowel Cancer](#) factsheet for further details.

Radiotherapy is often given pre-operatively to patients with rectal cancer, but it may also be given after surgery. Our factsheet [Radiotherapy for Bowel Cancer](#) gives detailed information on this treatment.

Follow Up

There is no set follow-up regime and each consultant/hospital has its own post-surgery timetable. You will usually have a follow-up appointment at the hospital around 6 weeks after surgery. Recent studies have shown that there is little difference in relapse rates in patients who are vigorously followed up compared to those who are seen less often or who have fewer invasive tests.

You can expect to have blood tests and a colonoscopy is usually carried out 1 year post-operatively. The frequency and type of follow-up can depend on whether you are having further treatment, for example chemotherapy or radiotherapy. CT scans will be carried out to monitor your response to the treatment. If you feel unwell in any way do not hesitate to contact your GP. Your GP should be contacted urgently especially if you have:

- Severe abdominal /shoulder pain
- High temperature (shivering/fever)
- Persistent nausea/vomiting
- Swelling, redness, pain and discharge from the wound

After a diagnosis of bowel cancer you will, understandably, be intensely aware of changes in your body. Like everyone, you may still get common ailments that make you feel off-colour, such as tummy upsets, colds and 'flu. If you experience changes that you cannot explain or changes that persist or recur, talk to your doctor without delay. Do not ignore symptoms such as digestive problems, pain, a feeling of weakness or exhaustion, unexplained loss of appetite, weight loss or gain, frequent headaches, jaundice (yellowing skin) or a persistent cough.

Useful Numbers

Bowel Cancer Advisory Service: freephone 0800 8 40 35 40

Email: advisory@bowelcanceruk.org.uk
www.bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

Provides specialist information and support for people with cancer at every stage of their illness. They also provide financial help through patient grants (applications for grants through nurses, social workers and other health care professionals)

Nurse Information helpline (09.00-22.00, Mon-Fri) 0808 808 1234

Benefits helpline (09.00-22.00, Mon-Fri) 0800 500 800

Email: cancerline@macmillan.org.uk
www.macmillan.org.uk

Colostomy Association

Provides information and support following a colostomy operation

0800 587 6744 (24 hrs)

Email: cass@colostomyassociation.org.uk
www.colostomyassociation.org.uk

The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

Provides information and help for people who have had surgery to remove the colon

0800 0184 724

email: info@iasupport.org
www.iasupport.org

The British Red Cross

0844 871 11 11

www.redcross.org.uk

You may find the following additional factsheets helpful:

- Eating After Bowel Surgery
- Chemotherapy for Bowel Cancer
- Radiotherapy for Bowel Cancer

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For further information contact the Bowel Cancer Advisory Service on: (Freephone) 0800 8 40 35 40

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