

RECOVERY GUIDE

Understanding Your Recovery

What to Expect After Surgery

Recovery looks different for everyone, and it rarely moves in a straight line. This guide covers what's generally normal to expect as you heal — alongside your procedure-specific discharge instructions and physical therapy protocol, which remain your guide for exact timelines and restrictions. Keep this as a general reference throughout your recovery.

Pain Management

- Pain is expected, especially in the first few days to weeks, and should gradually improve over time — not disappear suddenly.
- Use pain medication as directed, along with ice, elevation, and any techniques discussed at your visit. Taking medication before pain becomes severe, particularly around therapy sessions, tends to work better than trying to catch up afterward.
- A steady increase in pain, rather than gradual improvement, is worth a call to our office.

Wound Care

- Keep your incision clean and dry as directed, and follow the specific dressing instructions provided at discharge.
- Some redness, warmth, or mild drainage in the days after surgery can be normal — your discharge instructions describe what to expect for your specific procedure.
- Avoid soaking the incision (baths, pools, hot tubs) until you're cleared to do so.

Swelling & Bruising

- Swelling and bruising are a normal part of healing and can be significant in the first few weeks, gradually improving over the following months.
- Elevation, ice, and compression (as directed) help manage swelling, especially early on.
- Bruising may spread and change color before it fades — this is normal and not a concern on its own.

Activity Progression

- Recovery generally moves through a few broad phases: protecting the surgical area and controlling pain and swelling early on, rebuilding motion and strength in the middle phase, and progressing back toward your normal activities and goals in the final phase.
- Your specific timeline, weight-bearing status, and restrictions are detailed in your procedure-specific rehabilitation protocol — follow that as your guide for what's safe at each stage.
- Early, gentle movement (as permitted) helps prevent stiffness and supports circulation — avoid prolonged bed rest unless instructed otherwise.

Physical Therapy

- Physical therapy is a central part of most recoveries — attend sessions consistently and complete home exercises as prescribed, even on days you don't feel like it.
- Therapy isn't one-size-fits-all — it's adjusted to your procedure, your progress, and your goals.
- Let your therapist and our office know if exercises feel unusually painful or something doesn't seem right.

Nutrition & Hydration

- Good nutrition supports tissue healing — aim for adequate protein, a balanced diet, and good hydration throughout recovery.
- Constipation is a common side effect of pain medication and reduced activity — increasing fiber, fluids, and gentle movement can help.
- If you have specific dietary needs or concerns, mention them at your visits.

Sleep & Rest

- Quality sleep supports healing — try to maintain a consistent routine, and use extra pillows for positioning and comfort if needed.
- Rest is important, but so is following your activity guidelines — balance the two rather than defaulting to complete inactivity.

The Emotional Side of Recovery

- It's common to feel frustrated, impatient, or discouraged at some point during recovery — especially when progress feels slow or plateaus. This is a normal part of the process, not a sign that something is wrong.
- Recovery is rarely a straight line — good days and harder days both happen, sometimes in the same week.
- Lean on your support system, and don't hesitate to bring up how you're feeling — physically or emotionally — at your appointments. We're here for the whole process, not just the surgery.

Warning Signs — When to Call Us

Signs of Infection

- Increasing redness, warmth, or swelling around the incision
- Drainage that is thick, cloudy, or foul-smelling — or drainage that increases rather than decreases
- Fever over 101°F (38.3°C), chills, or night sweats
- Pain that is steadily worsening rather than improving

Signs of a Possible Blood Clot

- Swelling, pain, tenderness, warmth, or redness in the calf or leg, especially if it's one-sided

If any of the signs above appear, call our office promptly.

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room for sudden shortness of breath, chest pain, or lightheadedness — these can be signs of a clot that has traveled to the lungs.

Follow-Up Visits

- Follow-up appointments are how we track healing, adjust your recovery plan, and catch any issues early — even if you're feeling great, these visits matter.
- Bring your questions, and let us know about anything that concerns you, even if it seems minor.

Questions During Your Recovery

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This guide provides general recovery information and does not replace your procedure-specific discharge instructions, rehabilitation protocol, or individualized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by our office for your surgery.