

# Going home after brain surgery

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## **Will I need to have someone stay with me?**

You will need to have someone to stay with you after you go home until you feel safe to be alone for at least a few days after your surgery.

Work with your health care team to determine how long you may need support and what supports are available in the community.

## **How do I take care of my incisions?**

Your incision is closed with staples or stitches and may be covered with a small sterile bandage or left open to the air. You will need to make an appointment to see your family doctor 7 to 10 days after your surgery. Your staples or stitches will be removed at that time and your incision will be checked.

It is important to have your incision checked within 10 days of your surgery, even when you have dissolving stitches.

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**Tips:**

- You may gently wash your hair on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Use a fragrance-free shampoo, such as baby shampoo, unless your surgeon tells you differently. Do not “scrub” or rub the incision site. You can let warm water run down your incision. Dried blood may take a few washes to be completely removed.
- Try not to touch your incision while it is healing. This will help to prevent transferring germs or dirt to it from your fingers.
- Hair care products, such as hair spray and gels, can be used after one month as long as your incision is well healed.
- Do not use any lotions on the incision unless prescribed by your surgeon. You may apply a polytopic ointment (such as Polysporin®) as it is healing. Ask your nurse for direction.



You can wear a hat or scarf if desired. However, make sure that the scarf or hat is clean, to prevent an infection in your incision.

## What are the signs of an infection?

Signs of infection are:

- redness or heat along the incision
- green, yellow or white drainage from your incision
- opening of your incision
- fever and chills or flu-like symptoms with any type of drainage from your incision



**If you have any signs of infection, call your family doctor or surgeon right away.**

**If your doctor or surgeon are not available, go to an Urgent Care Centre.**

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## How do I prevent or treat constipation?

Constipation is having to strain or push hard to have a bowel movement.

People are constipated when their pattern of bowel movement changes and they have trouble passing stool. In the hospital, we would like most people to have their first bowel movement within 3 days after surgery.

It is very important after brain surgery to not push or strain to have a bowel movement. This could cause problems such as increased pressure in the brain after surgery.

### Tips to prevent constipation at home:

- Adding fibre to your diet is a good way to prevent or treat constipation. Foods that have fibre include whole grain breads and cereals, bran, fresh fruit, vegetables and legumes such as kidney beans, chick peas and lentils.
- A soft stool contains lots of water and is easy to pass without straining. Drinking plenty of fluids is important to have a soft stool. Drink 6 to 8 cups (1.5 litres) of fluids a day when increasing your fibre intake.
- Exercise and activity help your bowels to keep moving. Walking is a good way to increase activity.



You may need medications to help your bowels move. Use medication only when needed.

**Call your family doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns about constipation or how to treat it at home.**

## What activities can I do?

Gradually return to your normal physical activities during the first month at home. Many people return to too many activities too quickly.

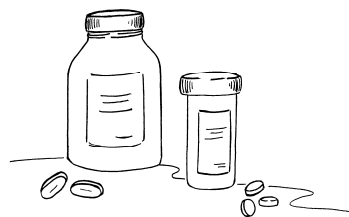
Planning and pacing your activities during the day will help you manage your symptoms, increase your tolerance and help you return to doing the things you did before your surgery. Doing nothing all day will not help you to recover but doing too much will make your symptoms last longer. Avoid activities that cause you to strain such as lifting heavy objects or doing strenuous activities for the first month after your surgery.



Ask your surgeon when you can have sex after your surgery.

## What about my medications?

Before you leave the hospital, the doctor will give you a prescription for your medications to take at home. Continue to take any medications you took before your surgery unless told otherwise by your surgeon.



### Tips:

- Know which medications you have already taken while in the hospital the day you leave.
- Arrange for someone to take your prescriptions to the pharmacy and pick up your medication.
- Know which medications, their dosages and times, to take at home. You may want to buy a pill organizer from your pharmacy. Carry an updated list of your medications with you at all times.



If you have questions, please ask your nurse or pharmacist.

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## What about driving?

You will not be able to drive a car until the surgeon says you are ready. Discuss this with your surgeon at your follow up appointment.



## What about going back to work or school?

Plan for at least 4 to 6 weeks off – everyone is different. You will need that time to heal in order to return to your previous activities. Talk to your surgeon at your follow up appointment about when you can return to work or school. If you have concerns, please contact the social worker on 7 West to help you.



## What about drugs and alcohol?

Do not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs.

Drinking alcohol or drugs:

- makes balance and coordination worse, which increases the risk of falling
- further reduces self-control
- affects recovery of brain cells



Please talk to the nurse practitioner, social worker or surgeon if stopping alcohol/drugs will be difficult for you.

The combination of alcohol, prescription medications and/or recreational drugs can cause:

- seizures
- visual problems
- additional loss of brain cells
- unpredictable reactions to medications
- decreased balance



## **When should I see my doctors for follow-up?**

Make an appointment with your family doctor to check your progress 2 weeks after your surgery

You will see your neurosurgeon 4 to 6 weeks after your surgery. You may need to have follow-up tests done before this appointment. These appointments may be booked before you leave the hospital and your nurse will provide you with the required information.



**It is important that you keep these appointments.**

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During the first 4 to 6 weeks at home expect to have some nausea, fatigue and headaches. Call your neurosurgeon if you have:

- a severe headache that gets worse or is not helped by the pain pills
- difficulty waking up
- nausea and/or vomiting that get worse with a headache
- a seizure
- decreased strength in arms or legs
- changes in your understanding of speech or your ability to speak
- new vision problems
- increased redness, swelling, tenderness or drainage around your incision
- drainage of clear fluid from your incision, nose or down the back of your throat
- a return of previous neurological symptoms

## Questions or concern



**If you cannot reach your neurosurgeon,  
call the 7 West Charge Nurse**

**905-521-2100, Ext. 46750**

**OR**

**Go to the emergency department for urgent  
medical issues.**

**Notes:**



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