

Physiotherapy department

Advice following abdominal surgery

The following information is designed to help you after your discharge from hospital and to guide your return to activity.

First few days at home

For the first couple of days at home you should rest, following the same routine as in The Christie. You may walk around the house, up and downstairs as necessary. You may find you tire easily but do not worry about this. The return to your usual activities takes time and is a gradual process.

Walking

We recommend regular walking as the main exercise to maintain your fitness. Begin by pottering around the house and garden or walking to the local shops. Aim to have a walk daily and gradually progress by increasing the distance and/or the speed of your walk.

Good posture

It is very important to maintain a good posture. If you allow yourself to become stooped when you stand or walk this may encourage back pain to develop. When you are sitting in a chair, try to make sure your back is supported. Avoid a slumped position at all times.

Getting into and out of bed

For the first 6 weeks following your surgery you should get into and out of bed using a 'log rolling' technique. This reduces the stress on your abdominal wound and reduces pain on movement. For example, when getting out of bed keep your knees bent. Roll your body on to your side dropping your legs over the edge of the bed. Push yourself up into the sitting position on the edge of the bed using your hand and arms. Reverse the procedure when getting into bed.

Discomfort

Some discomfort around your wound sites is quite common after surgery. We advise you take your painkillers regularly as prescribed by your doctor for as long as you have pain, so that you are able to breathe deeply, cough, sleep and move more comfortably.

Whilst in The Christie you should sleep with a pillow under your knees. This will help with any discomfort and reduce any stress on your abdominal wound during healing. You no longer need to use the pillow when you go home if you are comfortable without it. You can also lie on your tummy when it is comfortable to do so.



Lifting

Reduce lifting wherever possible in the first 6 weeks following your surgery to allow your body time to heal. As a guide, do not lift more than a full 3 pint kettle of water or its equivalent of 3 to 4 kgs or 6 to 8 lbs. Do not attempt heavy lifting or moving furniture until 12 weeks after surgery.

Remember: When you do lift, do it correctly. With your feet apart, bend your knees, keep your back straight and tighten your tummy muscles. Hold the object close to your body and lift by straightening your knees.

Household tasks and gardening

Remember these are only *guidelines* – you should take things at your own pace and increase activities a little at a time. It is important to concentrate on becoming more active but at the pace your body dictates. If you are unsure consult your doctor.

First 4 weeks at home: Start by taking things gently. You may begin light activities in the house such as washing up, dusting and easy household jobs.

After 4 to 6 weeks: You may further increase activities to include for example, vacuuming, ironing, cooking, hanging out washing, making beds.

After 6 weeks: Provided there are no problems at your outpatient appointment, resume all normal activities within your own limits. You can start light gardening jobs. Hand weeding, planting small plants kneeling on all fours and light hoeing are acceptable.

Sport and active hobbies

A gradual return to exercise is advised.

After 4 weeks at home you can start low impact exercises, for example, use of a cross trainer in a gym, swimming (provided your wound has healed), dancing, hill walking.

After 6 to 8 weeks at home more strenuous exercise such as golf, racquet sports, jogging, aerobics, cycling and most other sports can be started. If in doubt, check with your doctor.

Driving

Do not drive for 4 to 6 weeks following surgery. In the interests of road safety, you must be sure that you can safely control your vehicle at all times, for example, be able to do an emergency stop safely. However, we do advise that you check with your insurance company if you have an exclusion clause on your policy related to major surgery. Some insurance companies insist on a 'fitness to drive' report from your GP. Check with your doctor if you are in doubt. You can also contact the DVLA for advice on www.dvla.gov.uk or call **0870 600 0301**.

Wound healing and massage

Firm massage with a simple moisturiser over the scar and skin of the abdomen when your wound has healed is recommended. This may help reduce the risk of tight scar formation and keep the skin supple. Use your fingers on the palm of your hand. Move the top layer of skin on the underlying layers in a circular motion or away from the scar. We suggest using for example Bio Oil or E45.

Abdominal stretching

Once your wounds have healed, you can begin to gently stretch your abdomen. This may help you regain your normal posture and prevent tight scarring. Progress from lying flat on your back to lying on your tummy and then to lying on your tummy propped up on your elbows.

Returning to work

Your doctor will advise you when to return to work. It may be any time up to 12 weeks after surgery depending on the type of work you do, the amount of travelling involved, the amount of lifting involved and the rate of your recovery.

Sexual intercourse

This may be resumed as soon as you feel comfortable.

It is important to continue all these exercises until you feel you are back to normal, that is, back to work if appropriate, having regained your fitness and range of movement as before, and enjoying sports and activities. This can sometimes take at least 12 weeks.

To further improve your abdominal strength, we recommend Pilates. You can start this 6 weeks post surgery. You will need to find a beginners class in your local area.

For any further information or advice, contact the physiotherapy department at The Christie on 0161 446 3795

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **patient.information@christie.nhs.uk**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week