



Spire
Southampton Hospital

PATIENT ADVICE LEAFLET

CONSTIPATION FOLLOWING SURGERY.

CAUSES OF CONSTIPATION FOLLOWING SURGERY

Many people suffer from a bout of constipation after surgery. Why does this occur after surgery?
Here are a few causes:

Pain medication and anaesthesia

Prescription medications for pain are a primary source of constipation. If you are taking larger or multiple doses after surgery or you have been taking them for a long time, you will be more likely to become constipated. Anaesthesia puts your muscles to sleep for surgery, but it also does this for your bowels, meaning that whatever was in there will stay immobile until after the intestine wakes up.

Pre-surgery restrictions

Your doctor is likely to ask you to avoid eating and drinking for an extended period before surgery and may have advised drinking minimally and not eating at all or only a liquid diet for a few days. This helps with surgery and recovery but unfortunately it does play havoc with your elimination by fluctuating the levels of fluid in your body (these are necessary to soften and help excrete stools) and providing waste to pass through the system.

Inactivity

Having surgery, you have found yourself with less ability to be mobile. This can lead to constipation as motion helps waste pass through the system.

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT CONSTIPATION AFTER SURGERY

Now that you know why it has happened what can you do to help relieve it and get back to normal?
Here are a few simple changes that can help a great deal:

Drink more fluids

Drink plenty of non-caffeinated beverages, this will help your body to pass the wastes smoothly and reduce your risk of dehydration which would make the problem worse (caffeinated beverages can be dehydrating) by hardening your stool.

More fibre

Eat foods that have a high fibre content like fruits, veggies, and whole grain cereals. This will help everything pass much more smoothly.

Medication

Your doctor might prescribe or suggest an over-the-counter stool softener to help prevent your pain medications from causing constipation. Do not take any of these drugs without talking to your doctor first (if they do not prescribe them) to be sure, they would advise their use

RISKS OF POST-OPERATIVE CONSTIPATION

If you are constipated for, an extended period of time after surgery or the rate of dehydration is very high you could be at risk for impaction. Impaction is when the stool is too dry and hard to be passed through the bowels and is lodged there requiring medical interventions such as enemas.

If enemas do not work then this could lead to hospitalisation. You might also put your surgical wounds at risk, as they can become strained or even open-up due to the effort you might put into trying to pass hardened stool.

Always listen to the advice of your physician when dealing with post-operative care and health to prevent this level of severity.

USING A LAXATIVE FOR CONSTIPATION POST-OPERATIVELY

Introduction

Lactulose is a natural mineral that helps with constipation by increasing the amount of water that goes through the bowel. Taken regularly it does not cause damage to the bowel. The aim is to produce a soft easily passed stool without straining or causing pain.

Reasons to take lactulose or other laxatives

Post-operatively if you are taking painkillers for pain relief this can lead to constipation, particularly if you are prone to this. To stop this happening to you we recommend that lactulose or another laxative is taken from the third day post operatively if your bowels have not opened.

Any patients undergoing abdominal surgery are advised not to strain to have a bowel movement post surgery. So taking this medicine will help you to have your bowels open without straining.

Recommended dose

Two (2) teaspoons morning and night usually suffice to get things moving. Increase by a teaspoon more each day by the third day of taking or until your bowels are opening normally.

If your bowels become watery or diarrhoea occurs, then stop taking laxatives immediately.

For further advice if you are still suffering from constipation.
Please contact us on Tel: 02380 775 544

Looking after you.