



## Effects of Treatment

### Surgery

Surgery is a treatment in which a part of the body is cut open so that a surgeon can repair, remove, or replace a diseased or damaged part. Therefore, there are risks/benefits and potential side effects and/or consequences of undergoing surgery. These vary from person to person and may be related to several factors:

- What type of surgery you've had, for example, keyhole or open
- What part of the body was operated on - what was removed, debulked or bypassed?
- Length and complexity of surgery - was the aim of surgery achieved?
- Other treatments you may have received before surgery, such as chemotherapy - which may affect healing and recovery
- Your general health - level of fitness and / or other medical conditions you may be dealing with - both physically and mentally.

Your nutritional status - before , during and after surgery - may also play a role. Further information about nutrition and surgery to the digestive system can be found [here](#).

As part of informed consent you will have received information about the risks and benefits of surgery - and may also have been given information about possible effects and / or consequences.

For example - the potential impact on fertility following surgery to either male or female reproductive organs.

### There are some effects that can be common across all types of surgery:

**Pain** - pain is not uncommon - but hopefully, as part of your pre-assessment or surgery work-up, you will have had the opportunity to discuss likely and preferred pain relief with your surgeon and / or anaesthetist.

**Numbness** - you may experience some numbness along the incision site (wound). This is not uncommon in surgery where the nerves in the skin are cut during the procedure. This does not necessarily cause you any problems and often continues for quite a while afterwards. It can be a little disconcerting though, at a later date, when feeling starts to return to the area - especially if you have become used to it being numb.

**Fatigue** - It is not uncommon to feel fatigue after surgery - especially if you have undergone a 'big' or long operation. In fact research shows that you can lose more glycogen (a form of carbohydrates stored in your muscles for energy), during surgery than while training 2-3 hours for a race. Factors that may influence the level of fatigue you may experience include:

- Level of fatigue beforehand
- Anaesthetic medications
- Pain relief
- Nutrition and appetite

and the energy your body uses to help repair and recover during and after surgery  
Fatigue usually improves as your body recovers - but it can take time - and that time will vary from person to person.

**Reduced appetite** - this may be related to anaesthesia and the medications you may need to take in and around surgery - for example, some antibiotics can leave a metallic taste in the mouth, which makes everything taste odd.

If you have had surgery that may affect how soon you can restart eating - talking to a dietician before and during your hospital stay - may help - especially if your surgery may require you to alter your usual diet in anyway or you have lost weight.

Further information on diet and nutrition can be found [here](#).

**Bleeding/bruising** - It is not unusual to experience some, slight, bleeding from the operation site - heavy bleeding requires urgent attention.

Bruising may also be normal, depending on the type of surgery and whether you are receiving or self injecting blood thinning medication (anti-coagulation such as heparin)— but if it is worsening (deepening or extending) - this needs urgent medical review.

**Swelling/ fluid collections / lymphoedema** - the body sees surgery as an injury. The natural response to injury is inflammation - caused by a rush of protective and repair factors to the site of harm - so some swelling is to be expected. internally this is often accompanied by fluid collection in the affected area - which is why you may have a wound drain in place for a number of days after an operation to allow this fluid to drain away, rather than collect and become a possible source of infection.

However, not all fluid that may gather at or near a surgical site will be directly related to this protect and recover process. In operations where lymph nodes are removed - the fluid that normally passes through them, into and out of the surrounding tissues, may not be able to drain back into the lymphatic system. This causes something known as lymphoedema - and may be a more common consequence in certain types of surgery than others - for example, following a mastectomy (breast removal) and lymph node clearance, lymphedema may occur in the arm on the same side of the body. It may also occur in certain abdominal procedures - where it may be referred to as chylous ascites (the accumulation of lymph rich fluid in the abdomen, causing swelling).

If lymphedema is a possible consequence of the surgery you are to undergo, it may help to speak to a lymphoedema therapist / specialist beforehand - for additional information and advice.

**Infection** - is a risk of surgery but may occur elsewhere in the body, during your stay in hospital. Wound care will be provided - alongside measures to reduce the risk of either a chest or urine infection.

**Altered function** - Occasionally surgery may result in either temporary or permanent altered function, because the part of the body responsible for a certain function has been removed or significantly altered. For example, removing part of the pancreas may result in a temporary alteration of blood sugar control, whereas removing all of it will result in insulin-dependent diabetes (as there will be no remaining pancreas left to carry out blood sugar control).

**Body Image** - Surgery is a treatment that can alter the way your body looks, feels and / or functions physically, it can also have an effect on how you feel about yourself and your body - you may experience positive and / or negative changes to your self-image.

Even if you have been able to talk to your specialist team about the changes surgery may bring about - it may still take some time to re-adjust, both physically and mentally, with these changes. If you are struggling with how you feel or find yourself becoming negative or distressed by these changes - let your specialist nurse / team or GP know.

Further information about support and counselling - can be found [here](#).

**Sexual and reproductive health :** how we feel about our bodies can also affect our most intimate relationships. Surgery, as mentioned above, can add a different dimension to that by resulting in either positive or negative effects on our self image.

As well as our self and body image - surgery may also impact on our sexual and reproductive health by altering physical functioning - and this should be discussed with you before surgery, whether it is a definite or possible effect of surgery.