

Adrenalectomy

The Adrenal Glands

The adrenals are two small, wedge shaped glands. They rest on top of each kidney. The outer layer is called the **adrenal cortex**.

They produce hormones such as cortisol. These hormones affect salt and water balance in the body. They also effect the body's response to stress. They effect metabolism, the immune system, and sexual development as well as function. The inner layer is called the **adrenal medulla** (muh-duh-luh). This produces hormones such as **epinephrine** (eh-puh-neh-frun). Also called adrenaline, this hormone increases blood pressure and heart rate when the body is stressed. Tumors in the adrenal glands can be cancerous or cause too much hormone in the body. This can cause problems such as high blood pressure, increased heart rate, excess sweating, and weakness.

Surgery

General anesthesia is used for your procedure. You will have either IV or inhaled medicines. These help put you into a deep sleep. Often the medicines are given to stop your muscles from working for a short period. An endotracheal tube (breathing tube) is used to help you breath. Most patients tolerate general anesthesia very well. It is considered very safe. The most common side effect is a mild sore throat and some nausea. There are many medicines that can be given to help prevent or reduce the nausea.

Most people can have their adrenal gland taken out through small wounds in their belly or back (with a laparoscope). Some will require a 3 to 9 inch incision (open approach) to remove the gland.

You will stay in the hospital overnight. You will most likely go home the day after surgery. Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

You may have aching in your shoulders from the gas put in your abdomen during surgery. For relief, lie flat and put several pillows under your hips. Stay in this position for 5-15 minutes. The gas pain will go away. A heating pad to your shoulder may also help.

How will I feel after surgery?

Your throat may be sore when you swallow. This is normal and can last 1-2 days.

Narcotic pain pills can be constipating. To prevent this problem, you may want to take a stool softener each day you use narcotic pain pills. Use them until you have your first bowel movement after your surgery. You may want to start with Peri-Colace®. Take **Peri-Colace®** tablets, 1-2 times a day as needed. Follow the package directions. Remember to drink plenty of fluids. Eat high fiber foods after surgery. If you have not had a bowel movement in 3 days please call us.

How do I care for my wound?

Small areas of bruising at your incision site are to be expected. Your incisions are closed with dissolvable stitches. They are located on the inside and the skin is closed with glue. The glue is waterproof. If you have Steri-strips (pieces of tape) covering the incision, leave the tape on until your next appointment in the surgeon's office. Curled tape edges may be trimmed with small scissors.

- Keep the wound clean and dry.

- Look at your wound daily, check for signs of an infection:
 - Spreading redness or swelling.
 - Foul-smelling drainage or pus.
 - A fever (more than 101° F by mouth).

What about pain?

Expect that your incision(s) will be tender. You will have prescription pain pills to use at home. You may take Tylenol® instead of the prescription pain pills. Once you are home you can also take ibuprofen or naproxen (Aleve®). Use ice at the incision sites, 20 minutes on 20 minutes off.

When can I eat?

You can eat your normal diet when you get home.

When can I take a shower?

You can and should shower after 2 days. Avoid soaking or scrubbing the incision(s) until they are well healed, or 2 weeks. No swimming or soaking in water for 2 weeks.

When can I drive?

Do not drive for at least 1 week after surgery. Do not drive if you are taking prescription pain pills.

When can I exercise?

- Do not lift more than 20 pounds for at least 2 weeks after surgery.
- If you have laparoscopic wounds you will be limited for 1-2 weeks. If you have a 3-9 inch wound, you will be limited for 4-6 weeks.
- Walking is okay and encouraged.

- No strenuous activity. This includes pulling, pushing and twisting until cleared by your doctor.
- Sexual activity may be resumed when you feel ready. This may not be for 2-3 weeks after your surgery.

When can I return to work?

Plan to take 1 week off from work to recover after surgery. If you require an open operation, you may require a longer time to recover (up to 4-6 weeks).

When should I get help?

- Pain that does not get better with narcotic pain pills
- Signs of infection like spreading redness or swelling, foul-smelling drainage or pus
- Temperature greater than 101°F
- Any other symptoms that concern you

How do I contact the doctor if I do not have an emergency?

Call **608-242-2888**. This is a 24-hour number.

Call toll free at: **1-800-323-8942**. Ask the operator to transfer you to the doctor on call for endocrine surgery.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2018. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5704.