Home Care After a Bowel Resection

This handout will tell you how to care for yourself at home after a bowel resection.

You had part of the large (colon) or small bowel removed. The two healthy ends were sewn or stapled back together, and the incision was closed.

Incision Care
Look at your incision daily. A normal wound is puffy and pink. You may have clear or pink drainage. It may be numb and bruised and will form scabs.

Symptoms
Watch for signs of infection:

- Increase in redness.
- Warm to the touch.
- Red or pink color that spreads beyond the incision site.
- Pus-like drainage.
- Excess swelling or bleeding.
- Fever (measured by mouth) more than 100.4º F for 2 readings, 4 hours apart.
- Increase in pain at the incision.

Activity
Do not soak in a bathtub, hot tub or swim until incision is fully healed. You may shower and gently wash the incision with a mild soap and water. Pat it dry.

Do not use lotion, powder, or ointment on your wound unless directed by your doctor.

If you have tape strips or glue on your wound, allow this to fall off on its own.

You do not need to wear a dressing on your wound unless it rubs on your clothes, drains or it is in a skin fold. If you wear a dressing, change it at least every day and more often if it gets wet.

It is normal for your incision to feel hard along the length. This is sometimes called a "healing ridge."

Bowel Movements
For 6 weeks after surgery, you may have an increased number of bowel movements each day. They may be loose, this is normal. As your body heals and your diet has more fiber, you will likely have fewer, and more formed bowel movements.

You may have some constipation if a section of your large bowel is removed and/or you are taking pain medicine or adding more fiber to your diet. It is important to add more fluids to your diet to help prevent this and help the healing process. Be sure to drink 8-10 eight-ounce glasses of fluid (without caffeine) every day.

Activity

- **Do not** lift more than 10 pounds for the first 6 weeks.
- **No** strenuous activity until your doctor says it is okay. Walking is fine and it helps you heal.
- **Avoid** rapid twisting and turning of the abdomen.
- Check with your doctor before going back to work.
- Resume sex when you feel ready.
- Ask your doctor when you may drive. You should not drive if you are taking opioid pain medicine.
- It may take 2-3 months for you to feel like yourself again.

Low Residue Diet
You will be on a low residue diet for 2 weeks after surgery. At your first follow-up visit, we will talk with you about your diet and when to start a general diet.

When to Call
Call the clinic if you notice:

- Any signs of infection
- Pain not well controlled
- Severe abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation
- Watery diarrhea

Who to Call
Digestive Health Center
Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm
(608) 242-2800 or **(855) 342-9900**

After hours, weekends or holidays this number will be answered by the paging operator. Ask for the doctor on call for Dr. _____. Leave your name and phone number with area code. The doctor will call you back.

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 © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All Rights Reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4430