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# Discharge Instructions for Surgery for Cancer of the Colon and Rectum

You have been diagnosed with cancer of the colon or rectum. Together, this is called colorectal cancer, but you have either colon or rectal cancer. Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the colon or rectum. Surgery to remove the cancer and surrounding tissue is an important part of your treatment. Usually just the affected part of the colon (partial colectomy) is removed. The goal with surgery for rectal cancer is to spare the rectal sphincter so people can control their bowel movements when treatment is done. Of course, sometimes this is not possible. Your healthcare provider may also want you to get more treatment after you heal. This may include radiation or chemotherapy. This sheet will help you care for yourself after surgery.

Always follow all directions you get from your healthcare providers. Contact them if you have any questions.

## Activity

Do's and don'ts include:

- Get up and move often. Use your pain medicine so you feel good enough to move.
- Slowly increase your activity over time. Start by taking short walks on a level surface.
- Don't lift anything heavier than 5 pounds or push anything like a vacuum cleaner or lawn mower until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- Don't drive until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- If you ride in a car for long trips, stop often to walk around a bit.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can go back to work. It depends on the kind of work you do. But it should be within 6 to 8 weeks after surgery.

## Home care

Once you are home:

- If you have a stoma (colostomy or ileostomy), take care of it as directed. Your healthcare providers showed you how to do this before you left the hospital. Ask for an instruction sheet about colostomy care if you did not get one. Make sure you know how to get the supplies you need.
- Shower as needed. Ask a friend or family member to stand close by in case you need help.
- Wash your cut (incision) site gently with soap and water. Pat dry. Don't rub.
- Check your incision every day. Look for redness, fluid leaking, swelling, or edges of the skin pulling apart.
- Take your medicines exactly as directed.

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- Don't take any other medicine, vitamins, supplements, or herbs unless your healthcare provider says it's OK.
  - Follow any diet and fluid intake tips you're given in the hospital.

## **Follow-up**

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by our staff.

## **When to call your healthcare provider**

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following occur:

- A lot of bleeding from your stoma
- Blood in your stool
- Hard stool
- No gas or stool
- Change in the color of your stoma
- Bulging skin around your stoma
- Stoma appears to be getting longer
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills
- Redness, swelling, bleeding, or fluid leaking from your incision
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Pain when urinating or changes in the color or smell of your urine
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pain that gets worse or doesn't get better with your pain medicine
- Redness, pain, warmth, or swelling in an arm or leg
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing

Make sure you know who to contact for help after office hours and on weekends and holidays.