

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) Surgery: *Recovering at home*

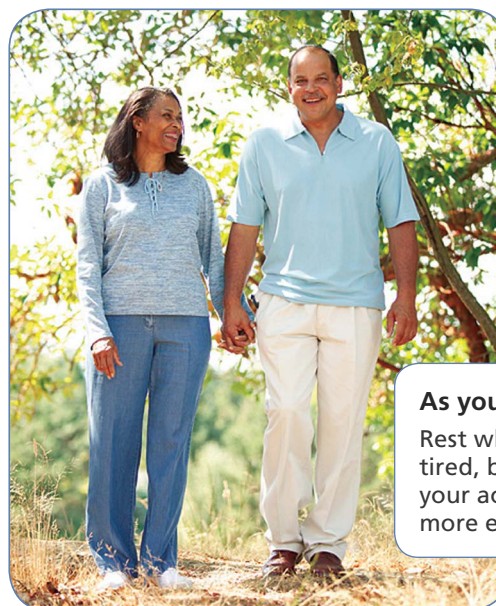
Your surgery and recovery

You had surgery to repair the weakened section of your abdominal aorta to prevent it from bursting. Recovery after AAA surgery can take 6 to 8 weeks. This fact sheet explains how to take care of yourself and speed your recovery at home.

Activity

While you are recovering, rest whenever you begin to feel tired. Resume activities slowly, doing a bit more each day.

- **Do NOT drive until your doctor says its okay**, usually 2 weeks after surgery. Before you begin driving again, be sure you are physically strong enough, your mind is clear, and you know how your pain medicine affects you.
- **Gradually increase your physical activity.** Walking is a good way to exercise. Start out slowly. As you can, add a little more walking time.
- **Do not put too much stress on your abdomen until it has healed.** Follow these instructions:
 - For the first 4 weeks, do NOT do household chores such as vacuuming, lawn mowing, or laundry. After the fourth week, gradually increase these activities over the following 2 weeks.
 - For the first six weeks, do NOT lift more than 5 to 10 pounds or anything you have to strain to pick up.
- **To find out when you can return to work**, speak with your doctor.
- **You may have sex when you feel ready.** Stop if you experience pain or discomfort.



As you recover

Rest when you feel tired, but increase your activity a little more each day.

When should I get medical help?

Call your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- Fever of 102° F or higher
- Redness, unusual drainage, warmth, or increasing pain at the incision site
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Not being able to have a bowel movement
- Burning or pain when you urinate

Call 911 if you have any of these symptoms:

- A sudden temperature change (coldness) in your legs
- Significant pain in your legs
- A sudden change in the color of your legs, such as turning white or blue
- Swelling at the surgical site
- Separation of the incision (the sides of the wound are pulling apart)
- Sudden difficulty in breathing

Wound care

Your incision will take several weeks to heal. You don't need to cover the incision while you are home, but please follow these directions while it heals:

- Check the incision every day.** This is very important. Please call your surgeon if you see any redness, drainage, or have increased tenderness. These could be signs of infection.
- Clean the incision every day to prevent infection.** You may shower 48 hours after surgery, but do not let the water directly hit the incision. Use soap and water to wash the site and gently pat it dry with a clean towel.
- Do NOT take baths.** Soaking exposes your incision to more bacteria.
- Do NOT use lotion, powder, cream, ointment, or any other product** on the incision, unless your doctor tells you to.
- Do NOT touch or handle** the incision any more than necessary.
- Follow your doctor's instructions about staples or Steri-Strips** used to close the incision:
 - If you have staples, you'll need to return to your doctor's office in about 7 to 10 days so they can be taken out.
 - If you have steri-strips, gently remove them before your follow-up appointment.

Constipation

Constipation is common after surgery. It is a common side effect of pain medicines. Try these tips to prevent or manage it:

- Include fruit, fiber, and bran in your diet.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Consider using a mild laxative for as long as you're taking your pain medication. You can also try a small enema if you become constipated.

If these remedies do not work, call your primary care provider.

Diet

A balanced diet will help you feel better and heal faster. During your recovery and after, aim to eat a well-balanced diet that focuses on:

- Protein to help tissues heal
- Fresh fruit and vegetables for vitamins and other important nutrients
- Fluids and fiber to help your bowels move

If your healthcare providers have given you a special diet to use, be sure to follow their directions.

Taking charge of peripheral vascular disease (PVD)

Your aneurysm is a sign of peripheral vascular disease. **Peripheral vascular disease (PVD)** is caused by the buildup of a material called **plaque** in your blood vessels. With PVD, the blood vessels can become narrowed or clogged, so blood doesn't flow as freely. Fortunately, you can slow this disease process, and sometimes even stop it, by making changes in your lifestyle.

How can I reduce my risk?

- **If you smoke, quit.** This is the single biggest difference you can make in your health. Ask your doctor or nurse for a copy of Intermountain's booklet *Quitting Tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom*. Or, call **1-800-QUIT-NOW** for the Utah Tobacco Quit Line, or go to waytoquit.org.
- **If you have diabetes, control it.** Keep your blood glucose (blood sugar) between 70 to 130 before a meal, and keep your **HbA1c** below 7%.
- **Control your blood pressure.** Aim to keep your blood pressure at less than 120/80 mm Hg. Medicine, exercise, and weight loss can help you meet this goal.
- **Control your cholesterol.** Work with your healthcare providers to keep your total cholesterol under 200 and your LDL ("bad") cholesterol under 100. If you have diabetes, you may need to take cholesterol medication, even if your cholesterol is normal.

- **If you're carrying extra weight, lose it — slowly and safely.** Ask your healthcare provider for a referral to see a dietitian. You can also go to the Weigh to Health classes offered by Intermountain.
- **Eat a "heart smart" diet.** Choose foods that are low in saturated fats, cholesterol, and salt. Fill up on fresh fruits and vegetables and high-fiber grains. See the illustration below for some tips on how to make heart-healthy meals.
- **Be more active.** Physical activity will help you lower your cholesterol levels, lower your blood pressure, strengthen your heart, and help you feel better overall.
- **Follow your doctor's instructions for taking medicines.** Certain medicines are especially helpful for PVD. They include aspirin and other antiplatelet (anti-clot) medicines, cholesterol-lowering medicine, and blood pressure medicine.
- **Check with your doctor before taking supplements.** While it is usually a good idea to take a multivitamin, some supplements can interact with other medicines and cause side effects. Talk to your doctor first before you start taking any vitamin or herbal supplement.
- **Go to your follow-up appointments** for regular checkups and follow-up testing.

Heart-healthy eating

How can you lower your cholesterol, manage blood sugar, control blood pressure, and have a healthier future? Follow these six building blocks:

1 Eat lots of fruit and vegetables.

Along with crunch and flavor, they give you healthy fiber and nutrients.



2 Eat more whole grains.

Whole wheat bread, oatmeal, and brown rice are just a few examples of whole-grain foods that give you fiber and complex carbohydrates.



3 Choose unsaturated fats and oils.

Unsaturated fat is liquid at room temperature, and comes mostly from plant sources. Examples include olive and canola oils, nuts, olives, avocados, and salmon.



4 Choose healthy proteins.

Some sources of protein can protect your heart and blood vessels over time. These include fish, beans, soy, and nuts.



5 Choose low-fat dairy products.

Stick with milk that's 1% or less fat, and enjoy low-fat or fat-free yogurt and cottage cheese.



6 Limit sodium (salt) and sugar.

Cutting back on salt is an important way to lower your blood pressure and protect your arteries. And for optimal weight and long-lasting energy, keep sugar and sweets to a minimum.

