

Exploratory Laparotomy

What is exploratory laparotomy?

Exploratory laparotomy [lap-uh-ROT-uh-mee] is surgery to look inside your abdomen (belly). It is usually done to look for problems that were not diagnosed by other tests.

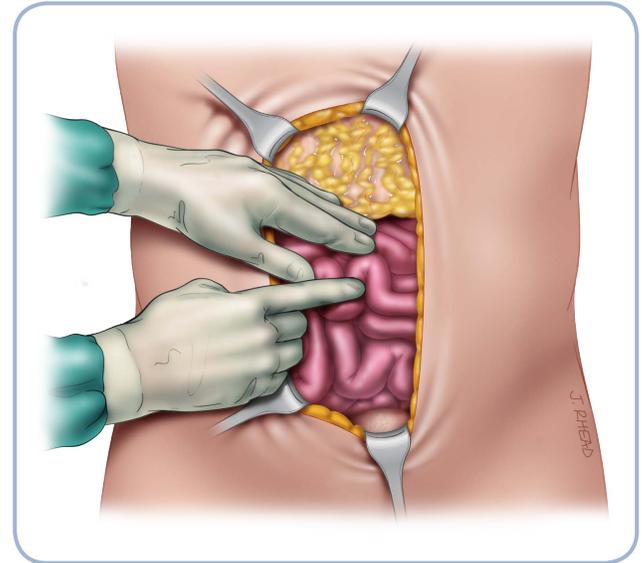
Why do I need exploratory laparotomy?

Your healthcare provider may recommend exploratory laparotomy if you:

- Have long-term abdominal pain
- Have disease in the organs of your abdomen or pelvis
- Are not a good candidate for a laparoscopic procedure

How is an exploratory laparotomy done?

- **You are given anesthesia to make you sleep.** You won't feel anything during the procedure. Your anesthesia provider will talk to you about your anesthesia medicine. Be sure to ask questions about how it works and how you may feel after your procedure.



- **The surgeon makes one large incision a few inches above your naval (belly button) to a few inches below.** This incision is used to see the organs of your abdomen including the:
 - Intestines (large and small)
 - Abdominal lymph nodes
 - Female reproductive organs (ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus)
 - Gallbladder
 - Liver
 - Pancreas
 - Spleen
 - Kidneys
 - Stomach
 - Appendix
- **The surgeon looks for damage or disease.** **The doctor may also:**
 - Take a biopsy (tissue sample) that is then sent to a laboratory to be checked
 - Take out tissue
 - Fix or take out parts of organs that are damaged or diseased
- **All surgical tools are removed and the incision is closed with sutures (stitches) or staples.** A drain may be placed to help remove excess fluid.



When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have:

- Severe abdominal pain, or pain you can't control
- Bleeding
- Chills
- Fever above 101°F
- Nausea or vomiting that doesn't stop
- Increasing redness or pus draining from any of your incisions

OR

- You can't urinate (pee) 8 to 10 hours after surgery
- You haven't had a bowel movement (poop) within 3 days of surgery
- You have questions or concerns about your surgery

What can I expect after surgery?

- **You will be taken to a recovery area where you will be watched until you wake up from anesthesia.** Then you will be allowed to see your family and friends. Ask for help if you need to get up or move around.
- **You may feel pain at the incision site.** This will get better over the first few days, but may take a few weeks to go away completely. Take your pain medicine exactly as ordered. It's easier to prevent pain than to stop it once it starts.
- **You may have a sore throat for 1 to 2 days after the surgery.** This is caused by irritation from the breathing tube placed during the procedure.
- **You may feel nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) for a day or two.** This is caused by some of the anesthesia medicines used in your surgery. Ask your surgeon or anesthesia provider about medicine that can help control nausea when you get home. Ice pops, apple juice, and electrolyte drinks may help you feel better. You can go back to your regular diet when the nausea goes away.



Follow-up appointment

Be sure to go to your follow-up appointment so your doctor can see how your incision is healing.

Your follow-up appointment is:

Date/Time: _____

Place: _____

Doctor: _____

How do I care for myself at home?

Incision care

- **Do not shower until your doctor says it's okay.** When you shower, don't let the spray directly hit your incision. Gently pat your wounds dry with a clean towel. Don't take a bath, soak in a hot tub, or go swimming until your doctor says it's okay.
- **If you have a wet dressing, you may take it off after 24 hours (1 day).** Your healthcare providers may ask you to replace the large padded dressing over your incision after 24 hours (1 day). If you have surgical strips over your wounds, **DO NOT** remove them. If the edges peel up, you can trim them with scissors. Let your doctor know if the surgical strips irritate your skin. If so, they may need to be removed earlier.
- **Watch for signs of infection at the incision site.** Your incision may leak fluid. It should be clear and possibly pink. If the fluid is thick, yellow, or smells bad, or you have a fever over 101° F, call your doctor right away.
- **Breathe deeply.** This may be hurt, but breathing deeply can help you heal and prevent complications.

If your healthcare providers tell you something different from these instructions, follow what they say.

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