

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.

Medicine

Opioid pain medicine is an important part of your recovery, but it comes with certain risks. To stay safe:

- **Follow all instructions from your doctor regarding your pain medicine.** When taken exactly as directed, they will help you move as needed to speed your recovery.
- **Ask your care team about taking a laxative and/or stool softener.** Constipation is common after surgery. It is a common side effect of pain medicines. In addition to a laxative, eat 5 to 7 servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 to 3 servings of whole grains, and drink 6 to 8 glasses of water daily.

Activity

While you are recovering, rest whenever you begin to feel tired. Take your time getting back to your activities, doing a little bit more each day.

- **Do not drive until your doctor says it's okay,** usually 2 weeks after surgery. Before you begin driving again, your body needs to be physically strong, your mind must be clear, and you need to know how your pain medicine affects you.
- **Do not return to work** until your doctor says it's okay.



When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have:

- A fever of 102° F (38.8° C) 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

- **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 4th week, gradually increase these activities over the following 2 weeks.
 - For the first 6 weeks, do not lift more than 5 to 10 pounds or anything you have to strain to pick up.
- **You may have sex when you feel ready.** Stop if you experience pain or discomfort.

Wound care

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

- Check your incision every day.** This is very important. 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 (2 days) 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 touch or handle** the incision any more than necessary.
- Do not take a bath, go swimming, or soak in a hot tub** until your doctor says it's okay. These activities can expose your incision to bacteria.
- Do not use lotion, powder, cream, ointment, or any other product** on your incision, unless your doctor says its okay.
- Follow your doctor's instructions about your staples or wound closure 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 wound closure strips, gently remove them before your follow-up appointment.



My follow-up appointment

Date/Time: _____

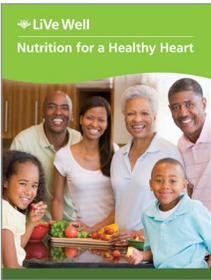
Place: _____

Doctor: _____



What do I need to do now?

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. You can slow and sometimes even stop PVD, by making the following changes:

- 1 If you smoke, quit.** Smoking is the biggest risk factor for vascular disease and complications. Ask your care team for a copy of the Intermountain booklet **Quitting tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom.** The cover of a booklet titled 'Quitting Tobacco: Your Journey to Freedom' featuring a man holding a baby.
- 2 Eat a heart-healthy diet.** A heart-healthy diet will help you lose weight, manage your cholesterol and lower your blood pressure. Ask your care team for a copy of the Intermountain booklet **Nutrition for a Healthy Heart.** The cover of a booklet titled 'Live Well: Nutrition for a Healthy Heart' featuring a family of five.
- 3 Be more active.** Physical activity can also help lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels, strengthen your heart, and improve your mood.
- 4 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.

Diet

A healthy, 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.

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.



Where can I learn more?

An Intermountain dietitian can answer questions about this eating plan. If you have questions about your medicine or symptoms, ask your doctor. Learn more about AAA surgery from the [U.S. Library of Medicine](#).

