

Clothing Fact Sheet

POST OPERATIVE CLOTHING: Plan Ahead for Comfort During Surgery



Major surgery interrupts personal and family routines. Extended recuperation increases the time before normal schedules and activities return. Looking your best provides a psychological lift during recovery from major surgery. Abdominal surgery, as well as limb surgery, may limit clothing choices.

Before surgery, ask your doctor about the degree of incapacitation expected and plan ahead for clothing needs while you are still independent and mobile.

Abdominal surgery, such as appendectomies, hysterectomies, Caesarean deliveries, or surgery on the stomach or digestive tract, usually causes abdominal swelling. Depending on the type of surgery, the degree of swelling will vary, as will the recovery time, before you will be able to fit back into your “pre-operative” sizes. In addition to swelling, the incision will be tender and will need to be protected. Items from your existing wardrobe may not fit or may be uncomfortable to wear.

If you are anticipating abdominal surgery, consider the following clothing needs:

- **Leaving the Hospital** - Abdominal swelling limits clothing choices. Wear loose-fitting garments to the hospital. Women should avoid fitted, zippered pants and skirts – they probably won’t zip when it’s time to leave. Even clothing with snug, elastic waistband may be uncomfortable.

A loose chemise or drop waist dress or jumper is a good choice for women. Men might consider sweat pants with drawstrings or use a pair of suspenders to hold up

trousers that won't fasten. A jacket shirt, long sweatshirt, or over shirt makes a good top.

- **At Home** - Avoid staying in your pajamas or nightgown all day. Getting dressed and looking "together" helps you feel better. Sweat pants or crew pants are a comfortable change from bed wear, especially those with drawstrings, which allow some flexibility at the waistline. Slacks or skirts with elastic in the back and a smooth band in the front may be slightly more comfortable than those with a totally elastic waistband.

Consider clothing that doesn't wrinkle easily. Resting and naps are necessary while recuperating. Knitted garments or those blended with polyester tend to show fewer wrinkles and look fresher.

- **Underwear** - Cotton underwear breathes and is absorbent and comfortable next to the skin. Cotton's fiber ends help the fabric stand away from the sensitive incision area rather than hug it, as some textured, synthetic fabrics do.

If you don't already have cotton briefs, buy a pair a size larger than your normal size. A little extra room adds comfort during recuperation. Men may also find boxer shorts more comfortable than jockey shorts. Check with your doctor to determine the exact location and size of incision.

For waistline incisions, bikini-cut styles may be better, while full cut-panties and shorts might be preferred for incisions in the lower abdomen.

- **Hosiery** - Women may find pantyhose uncomfortable against the abdomen. Thigh-high hosiery is an alternative, if the elastic isn't too snug. Individuals with circulatory problems should check with their doctors before wearing knee- or thigh-high hose.

Other alternatives include maternity hosiery, which allows more room in the abdomen, but is more costly. Individuals who normally wear standard size hosiery might try queen size until tenderness in the abdomen subsides. Initially, socks and shoes will be the mainstay so have a pair or two of standard crew socks or anklets on hand.

- **Footwear** - Wear shoes, not slippers, even when at home. Shoes give support and protect the feet. During recovery, individuals may be less steady on their feet. Any stumble or slip that puts the body out of alignment could cause discomfort.
- **Nightwear** - Loose-fitting nightgowns and nightshirts are comfortable, especially

when made from absorbent, breathable cotton or cotton-blends. If you prefer pajamas, select those with drawstrings. Elastic waists may be less comfortable for some people depending on swelling, tenderness and location of incisions.

- **Shop before your surgery** - To have some control over clothing choices, shop before surgery, if possible, to buy your own postoperative clothing.

Family members are usually doing “extra duty” during your recovery caring for you. Also, they might not select the exact color or styles you would prefer. For example, women’s cotton briefs come in elastic or band leg. You know your preferences, but another person might not.

Occasionally, unplanned surgery occurs. Mail order catalogs with home delivery offer shopping convenience and choice. Many companies deliver within a few days; some provide overnight service for a charge.

Suggestions above addressed conditions relating to abdominal surgery. If other types of surgery are anticipated, consult your doctor regarding temporary reduced mobility or incapacitation. For example, shoulder or arm surgery limits ability to wear clothing that goes on over the head. Garments that open down the front or stretch enough to go over the arm without inserting it into the sleeve may be needed temporarily.

For women, jumpers that open at the shoulder or down the entire side may be easier to get into than over-the-head garments. A loose chemise or drop waist dress or jumper makes a comfortable outfit while recuperating. Changing out of your pajamas during the day will help you look and feel better. Sweat pants and a sweatshirt are a sensible, comfortable choice. Ask questions, know what to expect, and have some attractive, cheerful clothing to wear during recuperation.

Comfort is important during recovery, but it also helps psychologically to look your best. The body may not be back to normal but “looking normal” helps. Besides, some outward is needed for doctors’ visits, short outings to cure “cabin fever,” and just to look your best as visitors come by the house to wish you well. Plan ahead so that, during a time of uncertainty, at least one part of your life will be under control.