



# Home Care After Hospital Discharge

We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to care for you at the Houston VA Medical Center. We hope that your recovery at home will be a speedy one. To help you along, we are providing some additional information that may be useful.

## Recovering at Home

You'll be going home after discharge from the hospital. Your doctor or nurse will give you instructions to follow. These will help you learn how to care for yourself and heal faster.

## For Your Comfort

You may have some pain when discharged depending on the procedure, treatment or surgery, you may have had. Pain medication will help you feel better and you'll heal more quickly. Ask your doctor about other ways to control pain, such as heat, ice, elevation and relaxation. Follow any instructions your doctor or nurse has given you. Pain medication helps you move around with more comfort. Take it only as directed, before pain becomes severe. Don't take it more or less often than you've been instructed to do. Taking it before bedtime may help you sleep. Taken as directed, pain medication is not addictive.

## For Your Safety

Don't drink alcohol for as long as you are taking pain medication. Don't drive or use heavy machinery or power tools, because pain medications can make you sleepy. Ask your doctor before taking other medications, herbs, or vitamins.

## Coping with Side Effects

Pain medication may cause constipation. Avoid laxatives unless they have been prescribed for you. Instead, increase your fluids and fiber. Tell your doctor if you have stomach pain, nausea, skin rash, itching, or hives.

Call your doctor if

You do not experience some pain relief after taking pain medication

You feel too sleepy, dizzy, or groggy

You have side effects like nausea, vomiting, or skin changes (rash, itching, or hives)

## Caring for Your Incision or Wound

When you go home, you may have a dressing to keep the area clean and dry. You may also have a tube or drain in place. Most bandages, tubes, and drains are easy to care for. Follow your doctor or nurse instructions. If possible keep the incision or wound site higher than your heart when you sit, rest, or sleep. This can help reduce pain and swelling.

## Watching for Infection

A slightly red, swollen incision is OK. So is some bleeding or discharge. But if redness, bleeding, or swelling increases, if the incision smells bad, or if it's warm to the touch, you may have an infection. If you notice any of these signs, gently place a clean dressing or

cloth over your incision and call your doctor. Also, fever can signal infection, so take your temperature twice a day. Call your doctor if your temperature stays above 101\* F.

### **Keeping Clean**

Follow your health care team's advice about bathing. Don't shower or bathe until your doctor says its OK. If you have a dressing, tube, or drain in place, keep it clean and dry. If a tube comes out, don't panic, but do call your doctor right away.

Call Your Doctor If

You have signs of infection, bleeding, or fever

You have numbness, increased swelling or pain, or bluish fingers or toes

### **Getting Good Nutrition**

Healthy eating helps your body heal itself. So try to eat what seems good to you. Your doctor will tell what diet to follow while you recover. Drinking liquids helps you feel better and balances your body's chemicals. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day (6 to 8 oz each), unless you've been told not to. Watch for dark yellow urine (a sign that you may not be getting enough fluids). Try foods that are easy to digest, like clear soup, toast, crackers, ginger ale, and gelatin. Avoid fatty foods that stay in your stomach a long time. Eat small amounts more often.

### **Becoming More Active**

When discharged from the hospital, you're likely to feel tired. So get plenty of rest to give your body time to heal. Slowly become more active. Follow your doctor's advice about deep breathing, coughing, driving, and other activity. It is important to keep your lungs clear, if you are being sent home with a spirometer, use it as you have been shown. You can use a pillow when you cough. Lastly, to avoid lung problems, **don't smoke**.

### **Moving Around the House**

Walking speeds healing. So get up and walk around as much as you can. Stand up slowly so you don't get dizzy. And get plenty of rest, so you don't get worn out.

Ask your doctor when it's safe to get back to more activity. Don't drive a car until your doctor says it's OK. Return to exercise slowly so you don't get too tired.

### **Follow-Up Visit**

Your doctor will check your healing and see that you're recovering safely. You will receive an appointment for your follow-up visit when discharged home. Ask when to return for your first follow-up visit and who to call to make the appointment.

### **Returning to Work**

Your doctor will tell you when you can return to work. It's often four to six weeks after major surgery and a few days after minor surgery. You may still be tired. So take frequent breaks during your workday and rest when you go home.