

How to prepare for surgery to recover faster



You're going to have an operation. This sheet explains:

- What you can do to recover faster
- What you can do to participate in this recovery

Why am I being given this sheet?

An operation stresses both the body and the mind. There are ways to recover faster from this stress. This sheet explains how to recover better.

At the end, in the appendix on page 5, there is a list of actions to do before and after the operation. Do them, and check each one off, to participate actively in your recovery.

And remember, you're not alone. Your care team is by your side every step of the way to support and encourage you.

What can I do before the operation?

IN THE WEEKS BEFORE THE OPERATION

Get informed and talk with your loved ones

Before and after your operation, read the information you're given. Also watch the videos available (see the Useful Resources section at the end). Talk with your loved ones so they can support you. This will help you to get ready, feel less anxious, and be more motivated.



Stay active

This maintains your muscle strength, reduces fatigue, and decreases stress. Staying active also prepares your body to recover better after surgery. This will reduce the risk of complications.

If you're already active, keep up your habits.

The key is to be consistent.



Eat a balanced and protein-rich diet

This helps you to have the energy needed to reduce the risks of infection. It also prepares your body, strengthens your muscles, and will help your wound heal.



Quit smoking

Smoking increases the risk of infection and complications after surgery, especially in the lungs. With smoking, the wound won't heal as well. So, this is why:

- It's better to stop smoking and vaping **4 to 6 weeks before the operation** or to reduce your consumption as much as possible.
- If you haven't quit, it's important **to not smoke in the 48 hours before the operation.**

Quitting smoking is hard. Get help.



Nicotine replacement products

Quit alcohol

You need to **stop taking alcohol 4 weeks before the operation.** This reduces the risks of bleeding, infection, and complications in the heart or lungs.

If you haven't stopped beforehand, don't drink any alcohol **24 to 48 hours before the operation.** Drinking alcohol can change the effect of the painkiller medications you'll be given during the operation.



Quit drugs

Drug use increases the risks after the operation: to the lungs, brain (stroke), and heart (heart attack). They can also make it more difficult to relieve pain.

You need to stop taking drugs 4 weeks before the operation.

There are resources to help you quit using drugs.

THE EVENING AND MORNING BEFORE THE OPERATION

The evening before the operation

Follow these tips, unless you've been told otherwise:

- Eat a normal meal.
- Drink enough to stay well hydrated.

The morning of the operation

- You can drink up to 1 hour before you arrive at the hospital. You can drink water, tea, black coffee (no milk, no cream), and pulp-free fruit juice. This gives your body energy and helps you recover better.
- It's recommended that you drink 500 ml (2 cups) of pulp-free juice 1 hour before your arrival at the hospital. This helps the body to be less stressed by the operation and makes your blood sugar levels more stable.

Follow these tips, unless you've been told to stop drinking after midnight.

If your operation is on the esophagus or if you have a stomach that empties too slowly (gastroparesis), you should not eat or drink from midnight on.



What can I do after the operation?

Control the pain

After the operation, it's normal to be in pain.

The **pain level** varies from person to person.

The pain will get less intense over time. For a good recovery, the pain level **should not be higher than 4 out of 10 on the pain level scale.**

This makes it easier to move, eat, and breathe.

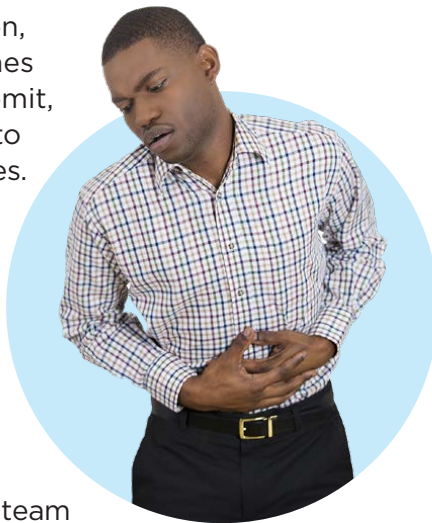
Don't wait until the pain level is too high.

Tell the nurse as soon as it reaches level 4. The nurse may give you painkillers, such as Tylenol and anti-inflammatories. Take them regularly.



Relieve discomfort

After an operation, patients sometimes feel nauseous, vomit, or have the urge to scratch themselves. These symptoms can slow down healing. They may prevent you from eating and walking normally, for example.



Talk to your care team right away. They can give you an appropriate treatment.

Move quickly and often

The sooner you move after an operation, the sooner you'll recover. Moving strengthens your muscles, improves blood circulation, reduces the risk of clots, gives you an appetite, helps with digestion, and prevents complications.

After surgery, the care team will help you sit in a chair and walk the same day.

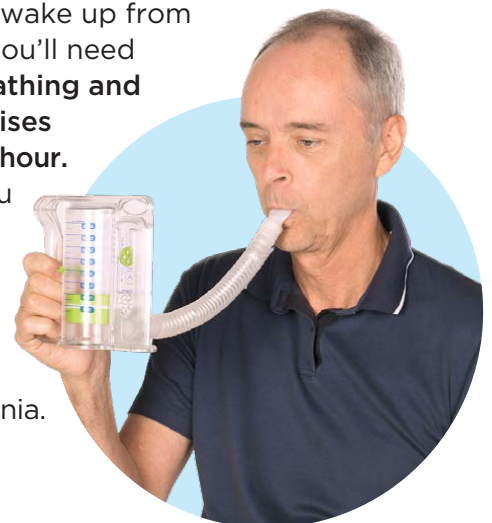


Starting the next day, sit in the chair at least 3 times a day. You'll also need to take several walks in your daily routine.

Activate your lungs

As soon as you wake up from the operation, you'll need to do **deep breathing and coughing exercises at least once an hour.**

This will help you breathe better and spit out secretions, and will prevent lung problems, such as pneumonia.



Eat and drink well

Unless you've been told otherwise, start drinking and eating as soon as possible after you leave the recovery room.

This will help to maintain your muscles, heal the wounds, jump-start your digestion, and prevent complications.

Track your progress

This will help motivate you and get you involved! You'll be given a logbook to track your activities. Return it to the nurse when you leave the hospital.

Is there anything else I can do to prepare?

Before the operation, plan ahead for your return to help you when you're back home.

- Make sure you have a loved one to accompany you when you leave the hospital.
- Do your housework before leaving for the hospital.
- Put a few prepared meals in the freezer.

See the health sheet [Getting Ready for my Operation](#) and the resources below for more important information.



USEFUL RESOURCES

**This health sheet is also available as a video (French only): QR code*



A physical activity program designed and adapted for older adults.

[Move50plus.ca](https://move50plus.ca)

Click on Let's Move → Collaborations and specific sessions → Click on Le GO pour bouger (French only)

Becoming active and getting informed as soon as you receive a cancer diagnosis.

[Coactif.ca](https://coactif.ca) (French only)

Preparing for the operation

[Chumontreal.qc.ca](https://chumontreal.qc.ca)

Click on Patients et visiteurs → Préparer mon opération (French only)

Eating well

[Canada's Food Guide](https://canadasfoodguide.ca)

Quit smoking

I Quit Now phone line

1 866 527 7383

[Tobaccofreequebec.ca](https://tobaccofreequebec.ca)

Guidance on alcohol and health

[Ccsa.ca](https://ccsa.ca)

In the search bar, type Summary of Canadian guidance → Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health

Help with quitting alcohol at the CHUM
514-890-8321

Help and services for drug dependency
trouvetoncentre.com

Videos on pain management

[Chumontreal.qc.ca](https://chumontreal.qc.ca)

In the search bar, type Service gestion douleur → Service transitionnel de gestion de la douleur → Préparation à l'opération (French only)

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you



You can also read them online.
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca

APPENDIX: ACTION LIST

Use this list to recover faster. It tells you what to do before and after the operation. Check off the actions you take as you go. Add checkboxes for those that need to be done multiple times.

In the weeks before the operation

Involve your loved ones and stay informed



- ☐ Read the health sheets.
- ☐ Watch the videos.
- ☐ Check out the Useful Resources.
- ☐ Visit the CHUM's website [Préparer mon opération](#) (French)
- ☐ Ask your questions.
- ☐ Talk with your loved ones throughout your care journey.

Stay active

- ☐ Walk as soon as you can.
- ☐ Take 10-minute walks, 3 times a day.
- ☐ Do some housework or gardening.
- ☐ Take public or active transportation.
- ☐ Stretch.
- ☐ Do activities with your loved ones.
- ☐ Join a physical activity group.



Eat a balanced and protein-rich diet

- ☐ Follow Canada's Food Guide
- ☐ Eat protein at every meal: meat, fish, legumes, eggs, nuts, and tofu
- ☐ Drink enough to be well hydrated (unless contraindicated).

Quit smoking

- ☐ Ask the nurse or doctor for a prescription for nicotine replacement therapy.
- ☐ Call the I Quit Now phone line for advice at 1 866 527 7383
- ☐ Read the fact sheet [Quitting smoking before my operation](#)

Quit alcohol

- ☐ Stop drinking or reduce your drinking as much as possible, 1 month before the operation
- ☐ If you haven't stopped beforehand, don't drink alcohol at all 48 hours before the operation.
- ☐ If you think you're having trouble quitting on your own, talk to your care team.

Quit drugs

- ☐ Get help from your care team if you think you're having trouble quitting or if you've ever had withdrawal symptoms.
- ☐ Don't stop alone or all at once. That can be dangerous for your health.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



After the operation

Control the pain

- ☐ Don't let the pain go above a level of 4 out of 10.
- ☐ Ask for acetaminophen (Tylenol) and anti-inflammatories every 4 to 6 hours. Tell the care team if this isn't enough to relieve your pain.
- ☐ Find distractions, call a loved one, or listen to music.
- ☐ Practice mindfulness meditation.

Get relief from discomfort

- ☐ Call a nurse and say how you're feeling. For example, you might feel like throwing up or scratching yourself. The nurse will give you something to help you feel better.

Move rapidly and often

- ☐ Ask your care team to help you get moving.
- ☐ Sit in the chair as often as possible.
- ☐ If needed, ask for a painkiller 30 minutes before doing any physical activity.
- ☐ Move your legs often.
- ☐ Take care of your own personal hygiene in the bathroom.
- ☐ Walk at least 3 times a day.
- ☐ Take advantage of visits from your loved ones to walk with them.
- ☐ Read the health sheet [Staying active in the hospital - Recover better with exercise.](#)



Activate your lungs

- ☐ Read the health sheet [Breathing exercises after surgery.](#)
- ☐ Do the exercises as soon as you wake up after the operation.
- ☐ Ask a nurse to watch you to make sure you do the exercises properly.
- ☐ To remember to do the exercises, set a reminder alarm.
- ☐ Ask for a stack of towels to support your abdomen while you cough.
- ☐ Do the exercises once every hour, with or without the device you were given, a spirometer.

Eat and drink well

- ☐ Eat and drink regularly.
- ☐ Eat protein at every meal and take protein supplements if you've been given any.
- ☐ Eat sitting in the chair.
- ☐ Ask your loved ones to bring foods you like, if allowed.
- ☐ Drink coffee to stimulate your bowels.

Track your progress

- ☐ Write down the progress you make every day in your logbook.
- ☐ Ask your care team for help in filling it out.

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chumontreal.qc.ca



Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.





Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important: your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.





Upcoming appointments

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