

Ileus Prevention after Gynecological Surgery

What is Ileus?

In the healthy digestive tract, a pumping action moves food and the waste products of digestion through the intestines. When this pumping action of the intestines stops for more than three days, the condition is called ileus (pronounced ILL-ee-us).

When an ileus happens, you cannot eat normally and cannot have bowel movements. This can lead to serious problems. You may have to stay longer in the hospital. You may need another surgery.

Risk Factors for Ileus

Three factors give you a high risk of developing an ileus:

- Decreased physical activity
- Surgery in the belly
- Taking pain medicines

The surgery your doctors will do to treat your cancer will give you all three of these risk factors. It is normal to have no digestive tract pumping action for a day or two after surgery. If this goes on for more than three days, you may have an ileus.

Signs of Ileus

When an ileus happens, these signs may appear:

- Crampy belly pain that comes and goes
- No bowel movements or passing of gas
- Nausea or vomiting
- Swelling of the belly

Preventing and Treating Ileus

You can help keep an ileus from happening. The first step is to maintain a healthy lifestyle before surgery. People who eat a well-balanced diet and exercise for at least 20 minutes three times a week are less likely to develop an ileus.

After the surgery, you can still take action:

- Chew gum as often as possible.
- Get out of bed and walk often, beginning soon after the surgery. This helps the pumping action start again. It is also important to your healing overall.
- Start eating a liquid diet 24 hours after surgery.
- Start eating a solid diet as soon as possible after surgery.

The list on the next page shows day-by-day guidelines for actions you can take.

After You Go Home

Here are more steps you can take when you are home from the hospital:

- Go outside to walk. Aim for a mile or more every day.
- Stand straight when walking.
- Breathe deeply.
- Be sure you have a bowel movement at least every other day.

When to Call for Help

If you go more than three days without a bowel movement after you are home, you may have developed an ileus.

Call your cancer care team during business hours, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

After hours, weekends, and holidays: Call 801-587-7000. Ask for the on-call resident for the surgical gynecology group.

Day of Surgery

- About 4 hours after surgery, stand at your bedside for 10 minutes. Repeat once before bedtime.
- Tell your nurse if you have pain.
- Tell your nurse if you have any nausea or vomiting.

Day after Surgery

- Walk around for 15 minutes, 4 times throughout the day.
- Spend an additional 60 minutes out of bed.
- Start eating a full liquid diet.
- Chew gum as much as possible throughout the day.
- Tell your nurse if you have pain.
- Tell your nurse if you have any nausea or vomiting.

Day 2

- Walk one lap around the surgical inpatient floor (440 feet), 5 times throughout the day.
- Spend an additional 60 minutes out of bed.
- Tell your nurse if you are hungry so you can start eating regular foods.
- Chew gum as much as possible throughout the day.
- Tell your nurse if you have pain.
- Tell your nurse if you have any nausea or vomiting.
- Tell your nurse if you pass gas. It is a milestone in your recovery.

Day 3

- Walk two laps around the surgical inpatient floor (880 feet), 4 times throughout the day.
- Spend an additional 60 minutes out of bed.
- Chew gum as much as possible throughout the day.
- Tell your nurse if you have pain.
- Tell your nurse if you have any nausea or vomiting.
- Tell your nurse if you pass gas or have a bowel movement (another important milestone).

Day 4 until you leave the hospital

- Walk four laps around the surgical inpatient floor (1,320 feet), 4 times throughout the day. This totals one mile of walking.
- Spend an additional 270 minutes (4.5 hours) out of bed.
- Chew gum as much as possible throughout the day.
- Tell your nurse if you have pain.
- Tell your nurse if you have any nausea or vomiting.
- Tell your nurse if you pass gas or have a bowel movement.