

Top Tips for Cancer Surgery

The duration of a hospital stay will vary depending on which type of cancer the patient has, discuss this with your surgeon beforehand to ease the anxiety of the unknown

Pack items that will ease your comfort levels, such as:

* Items to keep you distracted and mentally engaged - books, magazines, journal, crosswords and pens.

* Phone and phone charger, and ear phones - download an entertainment streaming service like Netflix or podcasts and download shows, movies or programs before arriving at the hospital in case there is no wifi on offer.

* Take ear plugs and an eye mask to block out noises and light when wanting to sleep.

* Include items for comfort in your bag such as underwear, button-up sleepwear, socks, slippers, dressing gown and your own blanket - don't forget a clean outfit for when you get discharged.

* Toiletries such as toothbrush and toothpaste, bar or liquid body wash, hand sanitiser, wet wipes, and cotton face cloth.

* Make sure that you stay hydrated at all times, especially after anesthetic, and if you suffer from nausea be sure to be aware of not getting dehydrated - pack your own bottles of water, fruit juice and energy drink - request glasses of ice to suck on to soothe a dry throat.

* Not everyone likes hospital food - take along some healthy snack items like dried fruit, nuts and snack bars.

* Before your hospital stay request a physiotherapist to meet you in your ward after surgery to assist with rehabilitation. Learn tips for exercises to do at home.

* Your mobility will be limited the first day. Try and be as mobile as soon as you can from the second day, this positively impacts on the duration of your recovery time.

* Pay attention to when the nurses empty your drains, watch what they do and ask questions so that you can confidently do them yourself at home. Ask for a syringe to take home that can be used to measure the drain fluid. Track the volume of liquid in a diary to show your surgeon. Drains can only be removed once you reach a certain level, and removal usually happens in the surgeon's office.

* Your first day may include a bed bath, as soon as the nurses are confident you can walk steadily they will allow you to bathe privately.

* If you are a breast cancer patient make contact with a member of Reach for Recovery before your surgery - they will provide you with support, drain bags and a mastectomy pillow.

* Do not feel shy to ask your doctor as many questions as needed, or to request extra painkillers.

* Wound and scar care will be advised by your surgeon and oncologist, and you will have regular check-ups following your surgery. Pay attention to any infection, intense pain or swelling and call your medical team immediately if you have any concerns.

* Bathing can be difficult with drains in. Be careful to not get them, or the wound, wet. A good tip is to wrap the drain in a plastic packet before bathing.

* **Above all else - Be patient and kind to yourself.** You have just experienced major surgery. Healing will take longer than you can expect. Give yourself this time. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance to manage the pain. Don't hold back in asking your circle of loved ones to help you. Try and be mobile each day to increase flexibility. There is always someone there to support you, reach out to support groups and networks to connect with other individuals who can relate to your journey. ♡ ♡ ♡

