

Laparotomy

Laparotomy is a major operation involving a long incision on the abdomen – either vertical or low horizontal (named Pfannenstiel) to treat various gynaecological conditions. It is performed in the operating theatre under general anaesthetic.

It is usually reserved for situations where less invasive procedures have failed or are inappropriate.

Most commonly this procedure is done in the following circumstances:

- Ovarian operations (eg removal of cysts, masses or whole ovaries)
- Hysterectomy
- Removal of fibroids (Myomectomy)
- Emergency life saving operation or to treat complications

Often the admission to hospital takes 3-7 days depending on the circumstances.

Pain and discomfort afterwards are significant and will depend on the actual procedure performed. Depending on the circumstance and anaesthetic considerations various pain relief options are utilized postoperatively.

Overall full recovery takes about 6 weeks during which no heavy lifting (>5kg) and significant physical strain should occur. Gentle walking, however, depending on the discomfort is encouraged.

Driving needs to be avoided for at least 4 weeks. Car insurance companies may withhold insurance for 6 weeks after a major operation such as this.

In case of hysterectomy avoiding pessaries, tampons and penetrative vaginal intercourse for 6 weeks afterwards is vital in avoiding complications.

Risks of this procedure include:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Blood transfusion
- Visceral trauma (bowel, bladder, ureters major blood vessels etc)
- Anaesthetic risks
- Deep venous thrombosis and/or pulmonary embolus (prevention of this includes special TEDS stockings and “blood-thinning” agents such as heparin and its variants)

A urinary catheter remains in the bladder for 1-3 days after the operation.

In the absence of any unforeseen complications discharge home is considered safe once the following occur:

- Reasonable pain control on oral medication;
- Normal urine voiding;
- Normal dietary intake;

- Bowels are opened;
- The patient can mobilize and self-care to a reasonable extent. In some circumstances ongoing assistance may be required depending on the patient's underlying overall functioning.

The following symptoms and signs are important to be aware of and report after the operation:

- Worsening and/or uncontrollable pain,
- Bright vaginal bleeding which is becoming heavier,
- Persistent nausea and/or vomiting.

I would discuss more specific issues regarding your particular circumstances with you at your appointment. Please feel free to ring me afterwards and/or make an appointment for further clarification.

In general I review patients in my office 1 and 6 weeks after discharge to discuss the results and progress.