Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Chewing Gum After Your Surgery

This resource explains how chewing gum after surgery can help your bowel get back to moving like normal. Your bowel is made up of your small intestine and large intestine (colon).

Sometimes, your bowel's movement is slowed or stopped for a little while after surgery. This is called postoperative ileus (post-AH-pruh-tiv IL-e-us). It can lead to:

- Discomfort.
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up).
- Vomiting (throwing up).
- A longer hospital stay.

Chewing gum after surgery can help prevent postoperative ileus and shorten recovery time. Here are some ways it helps.

- **It gets your digestive system working.** When you chew gum, your body makes saliva (spit). This can help kick-start your digestive system and bowel movement.
- **It makes your bowel move more.** Chewing gum activates the muscles in your digestive tract. This can help food and waste move through your intestines more quickly.
- **It helps lessen discomfort.** When your bowel moves more, you have less discomfort and uncomfortable bloating.
- **It can make your hospital stay shorter.** People who chew gum after surgery are more likely to recover faster. They are also more likely to leave the hospital sooner than people who do not chew gum.

What to expect before and after surgery

When you're scheduled for surgery, your healthcare provider will talk with you about chewing gum after surgery. If you want, you can bring a pack of gum with you on the day of your surgery. It's best to choose sugar-free gum. This helps protect your teeth and keeps your blood sugar stable.

Do not chew gum after midnight the night before your surgery.

After surgery, chew a piece of sugar-free gum for 30 minutes 3 times per day. It's best to do it in the morning, around noon, and in the evening.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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