Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Frequently Asked Questions About Walking After Your Surgery

This information answers some common questions about walking while you're recovering in the hospital after surgery.

Walking is one of the best activities to do while you're recovering after surgery. This includes walking with or without help from a person or an assistive device, such as a walker.

What are the benefits of walking after surgery?

It's very important to start walking as soon as it's safe after your surgery. The sooner you start walking, the faster you will recover and go back to doing your normal activities. Walking after surgery:

- Lowers your risk of problems as you heal from surgery.
- Gets your blood flowing throughout your body. This helps you heal faster after surgery. It also lowers your risk for blood clots.
- Prevents pressure injuries. A pressure injury is a sore on your skin. You can get them when a part of your body is under pressure for a long period of time. The pressure can come from lying in bed or sitting in a wheelchair for too long. Pressure injuries are also called bedsores or pressure sores.
- Reduces constipation. Constipation is a common problem that makes it hard to have bowel movements (poop).
- Eases gas pain.
- Helps you build your strength and endurance. This makes it easier to do your normal activities and to exercise.

- Helps with your coordination (control of your body movements), posture (sitting straight and standing tall), and balance.
- Keeps your joints flexible.
- Makes you more independent (able to do things on your own). It also helps improve your mood and self-esteem.

When should I start walking?

Recovery time is different for everyone. Your healthcare provider will tell you when it's safe for you to start walking. They may also tell you to avoid making certain movements as you heal from surgery.

Walking during your hospital stay is a very important part of your treatment plan. After your surgery, you will work with your care team to set daily walking goals. This involves getting you out of your hospital bed and walking as soon as it's safe to do so. You may work with a physical therapist (PT) or occupational therapist (OT) after surgery. If you do, they will show you how to walk safely.

Do not start walking until your care team says it's safe. Trying to walk when you're still weak from surgery can increase your risk of falling.

My care team says it's safe for me to start walking. How do I get started?

- **Set goals.** Aim to walk every 1 or 2 hours during the day. Work with your care team to set goals for walking. You can set a starting goal to walk 1 full lap around your hospital unit. Walk more laps each day. Setting goals for how many laps to walk and how far to walk depends on which MSK hospital you're in. For example, walking 14 laps around a unit at Memorial Hospital (MSK's main hospital) is equal to 1 mile. Reaching these kinds of goals will help you heal faster after surgery and leave the hospital on time. You can use the chart in the print version of this resource to keep track of your goals.
- **Ask your care team for help.** If you need help walking, ask your nurse or patient care technician to walk with you. If needed, your healthcare provider may refer you to a PT or OT for an evaluation. The PT or OT will check to see

if you need an assistive device to help you walk, such as a walker. If you do, they will give you one. Using an assistive device will help you feel more stable when you're walking.

- **Get ready for your walk.** If you're able to walk on your own, ask your nurse to help you get ready.
    - Your nurse will give you non-skid socks to wear. The socks will help keep you from slipping or falling. You can also wear a pair of your own slippers or sneakers if they are non-skid.
    - If you have intravenous (IV) lines or drains, your nurse will secure them to your body with a pin or special tape. This will make sure no tubes get in your way while you're walking.

Walking is a low-impact activity that's gentle on your joints. You should not be out of breath or sweaty when you walk. Talk with your care team if anything keeps you from walking, such as pain, weakness, or trouble breathing.

Chart to Track Your Daily Walking Goals

Day	Goal (Number of Laps to Walk)	Progress (Number of Laps Completed)
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

You can reuse this chart or make one like it to keep track of your daily walking goals at home. Before you leave the hospital, talk with your care team about how to reach your walking goals at home.

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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