

# Get Well Soon

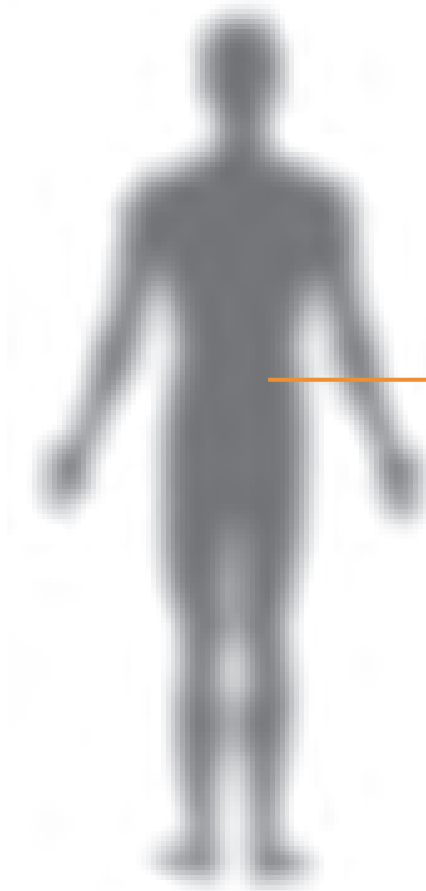
Helping you make a speedy recovery after your Laparoscopic Nephrectomy



The Royal College  
of Surgeons of England

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## Laparoscopic Nephrectomy

This leaflet is a guide to recovering from a laparoscopic nephrectomy. It does not provide specific medical advice or diagnosis. Nor does it give advice about whether you should consent to an operation. All of these matters depend on individual medical advice from your consultant surgeon based on your own health, medical condition and personal circumstances.

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To save ink, select the 'draft' option.

### WHO THIS LEAFLET IS FOR

This leaflet is for anyone who is recovering from, or is about to undergo surgery to *remove a kidney by keyhole surgery*. The technical term for your operation is a *laparoscopic nephrectomy*, which is how your surgeon and other health professionals who are helping you may refer to it. It should be read in conjunction with any other information you have already been given about your procedure.

The following information is designed to help you make the important decisions about your recovery - such as when you should go back to work, drive a car again, and generally just get back to enjoying life the way you like it. Your surgeon, GP and other healthcare professionals will offer you a lot of very good advice - but ultimately it's you that has to make the decision.

The advice in this leaflet offers broad guidelines for people who do not have any complications with their surgery, or other specific medical circumstances, such as a long-term condition

Obviously, every individual has different needs and recovers in different ways – so not all the advice in this leaflet will be suitable for everybody. When you're weighing up how to make the decision that's right for you, talk to your Occupational Health service at work, if you have one. Otherwise, talk to your GP. Either one will help you to make the right choices for a safe and speedy recovery.

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## WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER THE OPERATION

### Scar

You can expect between 3 and 5 small scars at different points on your abdomen. One of these will be longer than the others as it is through this wound that the kidney is removed. Most of these will have one dissolvable stitch.

### Stitches

Most stitches will not require any removal as they will be dissolvable - your surgical team will advise you when they should be removed. This can normally be performed by the practice nurse at your GP's surgery.

### Dressings

You do not need to keep the scars covered, though some people find it more comfortable to do so. You do not need to worry about getting the scar wet. Many patients have concerns that standing up straight will pull at the stitches. Don't worry about this. Getting out of bed and standing straight will actually help you to recover more quickly.

### Discomfort

You will experience some pain and discomfort around the scars, especially in the first week after the surgery. You may also experience some pain in your shoulders for a few days after the operation. Simple painkillers should be able to relieve this effectively for you.

### Tiredness & Feeling Emotional

Your body is using a lot of energy to heal itself, so you will feel more tired than normal - sometimes it can come upon you suddenly.

### Feeling Emotional

If you feel upset or emotional in the days and weeks after your operation, don't worry - this is a perfectly normal reaction which many people experience.

### Painkillers

Painkillers may well cause constipation, so it's important to get plenty of fibre in your diet while you are recovering. Fresh fruit and vegetables will help to keep your bowels moving regularly.

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### THINGS THAT WILL HELP YOU TO RECOVER MORE QUICKLY

#### **Eat Healthily**

Eating a healthy diet will help to ensure that your body has all the nutrients it needs to heal.

#### **Stop Smoking**

By not smoking - even if it's just for the time that you're recovering - you immediately start to improve your circulation and your breathing - not to mention a whole list of other benefits to the heart and lungs.

#### **Family and Friends**

Family and Friends can give you two important things:

- **Practical help** with the tasks you might be temporarily unable to do while you recover - such as driving, the weekly shop, or lifting heavier items.
- **Keeping Your Spirits Up** - the novelty soon wears off being home alone all day, and it's easy to feel isolated by this. Having company can help you to worry less. It's important not to let anxiety set in, as it can become a problem in itself which stands in the way of you getting back to your normal routine.

#### **Keep A Routine**

Get up at your normal time in the morning, get dressed, move about the house. If you get tired, you can rest later.

#### **Build Up Gradually**

Have a go at doing some of the things you'd normally do, but build up gradually. Some suggestions are included in the Recovery Tracker on pages 8-10. Obviously, everyone recovers at a different speed, so not all of the suggestions will be suitable for everybody.

When you're building up your activities, you may feel more tired than normal. If so, stop, and rest until your strength returns. If you feel pain, stop immediately and consult your GP or call NHS Direct.

#### **Don't sleep in - you can always rest later. Staying in bed can cause depression.**

If you live alone, and you do not have family or friends close by, organise support in advance - have family or friends come to stay with you for the first few days after surgery if possible.

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### RETURNING TO WORK

#### **Fact: Work can be part of your recovery**

Everyone needs time off to recover after an operation - but too much of it can stand in the way of you getting back to normal. In fact, by staying off for too long, people can become isolated and depressed. Getting back to your normal work routine sooner rather than later can actually help you to recover more quickly.

#### **Getting back to work**

How quickly you return to work depends on a number of things:

- How you heal
- How you respond to surgery
- The type of job you do

People whose work involves a lot of heavy lifting, or standing up or walking for long periods of time, will not be able to return to work as quickly as those who have office jobs which are less demanding physically.

#### **How soon can I go back?**

Every person recovers differently and has different needs. Some people find that they are well enough to return to work 2 weeks after surgery, though most people take 4 weeks to get back to work. However, if your job involves heavy lifting (more than 5kg at a time) or standing for prolonged periods of more than 20 minutes, then you will need between 4 and 6 weeks before you can return to normal work activities.

Your GP or surgeon will help you decide on the best time for you to return to work, based on your individual needs.

If your employer has an occupational health nurse or doctor they will advise you on this. Alternatively your GP can give you advice. Ultimately, it's your decision when you want to go back, and there's no insurance risk to your employer if you choose to do so.

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## Confidence

It will take you a little while to regain your full confidence when you go back to work. You may be slower than normal at first, so don't take on too much responsibility too soon. Don't be too hard on yourself about this - it's perfectly normal and you'll start to get back up to speed after a few days.

## PLANNING FOR YOUR RETURN

Talk to your Occupational Health service or GP to work out when and how is best for you to return to work.

Depending on the nature of your job, you might want to ask your employer about returning to work on lighter duties at first. This means:

- Spending more time sitting rather than standing or walking
- Doing work that is mostly paperwork, using a computer
- Not carrying more than around 5kg any significant distance
- Avoiding tasks such as prolonged loading or unloading, packing or unpacking.

If you have an HR Department at work, they will be able to advise you on how your absence might affect any benefits you may be receiving during your time off.

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**3 Golden rules for a speedy recovery:** • Stay active • Keep a normal daily routine • Keep social contact with people.

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## DRIVING

Your insurance company should be informed about your operation. Some companies will not insure drivers for a number of weeks after surgery, so it's important to check what your policy says.

### Driving - an exercise

Before resuming driving, you should be free from the sedative effects of any painkillers you may be taking. You should be comfortable in the driving position and able to safely control your car, including freely performing an emergency stop.

In the weeks after surgery, as you build up your strength and return to your normal range of activities, one of your final tasks will be returning to driving. Before you go out on the road again, practise the basic movements you need to drive safely, including an emergency stop. **Do this in a safe place without putting the key the ignition.** If you feel pain or soreness afterwards, leave it a few days and try again.

It is advisable not to restart driving with a long journey.

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## RECOVERY TRACKER

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
1-2 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You are still likely to be in hospital with generalised aches in your abdomen and perhaps some shoulder pain.</li><li>Moving in and out of bed may be sore.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Get up and move about, get yourself dressed and eat and drink as usual.</li><li>You will feel tired and perhaps feel like a sleep in the afternoon.</li></ul>		No
3-7 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Your pains will slowly be reducing in intensity and you will be able to move about more comfortably. You will still tire easily.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Continue as day 1-2</li><li>Go for a short walk in the morning - no longer than 10 minutes - then go home and rest. You may want to go for another short walk or two in the afternoon. These movements help keep the joints and muscles supple</li></ul>		No
1-2 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>There will be less pain as you move more and more and you will find your energy levels slowly returning.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Build up the activities you do around the house. You are encouraged to go for longer and more frequent walks during the day but to still rest after each one.</li></ul>		Not just yet



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## RECOVERY TRACKER

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
2-4 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There will be even less pain now as you move more and more and you will find your energy levels returning to normal.</li><li>• You should feel stronger every day.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build up the activities you do around the house to pre-operative levels. You are encouraged to go for longer and more frequent walks during the day and to perhaps limit your rest period to one in the afternoon.</li><li>• Further work on the knowledge that you've gained and aim to make those lifestyle changes permanent.</li><li>• Talk to your doctor about going back to work.</li></ul>	 	Yes, possibly on reduced hours or light duties at first. Most people will be back to full-time work after 4 weeks.

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## RECOVERY TRACKER

Days/Weeks Post Op	How you might feel	Things you can do safely	Traffic light	Fit to work?
6 weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If you haven't had any complications from surgery, you should be back to your full range of activities. You may still feel easily fatigued and need to rest more than usual.</li></ul>	<p>If you haven't had any complications to do with your surgery, and you're still off work, it's possible that you're feeling anxious about returning to work and could do with a bit of help from your GP and your employer. Talk to them both about a gradual return to work.</p> <p>If you're off for too long, there's a risk of developing problems to do with anxiety, isolation, and lack of confidence. These could affect your quality of life in the long term. Talk to your doctor about how best to avoid this becoming a problem for you.</p>		Yes

### When can I have sex?

For many people, being able to have sex again is an important milestone in their recovery. There are no set rules or times about when it's safe to do so other than whether it feels OK to you - treat it like any other physical activity and build up gradually.

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## AFTER YOU GET HOME

Day	Got up at ... am	Activities	How many hours rest I needed:	What times I needed to rest:	Went to bed at ... pm	How's your abdomen feeling?	How's your shoulder feeling?
1							
2							
3	Got up at ... am	Activities (eg walked for ... minutes)	How much rested I needed after each: :	Went to bed at ... pm	How've I been feeling? Any pain? Emotional feeling?	What do I want to achieve tomorrow?	
4							
5							
6							
7							

Remember, take a step-by-step approach to getting better, and build up your activities in small stages. Don't push yourself too far too fast. If you're concerned about anything, or if you feel you're not making progress fast enough, ask your surgeon or call your GP or NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

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## AFTER YOU GET HOME

Weeks	Got up at ... am	Activities (eg walked for ... minutes)	How much rested I needed after each:	Went to bed at ... pm	What do I want to achieve tomorrow?
2					
3					

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## KEEPING WELL

Because of your operation, the chances are you'll be a lot more aware of your body and how it works.

Right now is a really good time to build on the knowledge you've gained and make small changes to your lifestyle which can prevent you from experiencing certain health problems in the future. You can do this by:

- **Improving your diet** - get 5 portions of fresh fruit and veg per day.
- **Any exercise** – even if it's just a few short walks each day – really will make a difference to your health.
- **Quit Smoking** – NHS Stop Smoking Services are one of the most effective ways to stop for good – and they're completely free. Your doctor will be happy to help you.

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## Website Links

The internet's a great thing – anything you want to know is there for you at the click of a mouse... but, do be careful about the way you use it when it comes to getting information about your health. It's hard to know which sites to trust, and none of them can tell you anything that's specific to your individual medical needs.

If you do want to know more about your operation, recovery or return to work, here is a list of trusted websites that offer safe, sensible, useful information:

### **The British Association of Urological Surgeons**

[www.baus.org.uk](http://www.baus.org.uk)

### **American Urology Association**

[www.auanet.org/patients](http://www.auanet.org/patients)

### **The Royal College of Surgeons of England**

[www.rcseng.ac.uk](http://www.rcseng.ac.uk)

### **NHS Direct - 0845 46 47**

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

General information on kidneys can be found in Health Encyclopaedia section of this site

### **Health and Wellbeing**

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HealthAndWellBeing/index.htm>

### **DVLA - Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency**

<http://www.dvla.gov.uk/media/pdf/medical/aagv1.pdf>

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