

# VAGINAL REPAIR +/- VAGINAL HYSTERECTOMY

## Information for Patients

The following provides information for patients having a vaginal repair and/or vaginal hysterectomy. It is hoped that most areas will be covered but if you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask your surgeon.

### WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE THE OPERATION?

Your surgeon will normally have seen you in the Out Patient department prior to admission. You may be invited to hospital for a pre admission check up when you have your blood pressure measured, some blood taken and sometimes a recording of your heartbeat (ECG). You are usually admitted to hospital on the day of your surgery. You will be visited by your surgeon who may ask you to sign a consent form, if you haven't done this already. You will also meet the anaesthetist on the ward.

### HOW LONG DOES THE OPERATION TAKE?

If you only have a repair of one of the walls of the vagina (anterior repair or posterior repair) this usually takes approximately 30 minutes. A vaginal hysterectomy with repair of the vaginal walls normally takes 60-75 minutes.

### WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE OPERATION?

You will usually be kept in the recovery area for at least half an hour to make sure you are comfortable and your blood pressure is normal, etc. You will then be transferred back to the ward where you will be looked after by the nurses and visited regularly by your doctor/Consultant over the following few days. A drip is inserted at the time of the operation to provide patients with fluid, but this is removed as soon as you are eating and drinking normally. Antibiotics are given to try and reduce the risk of infection. Blood thinning injections are administered daily and you will be asked to wear some TED stockings until the time of your discharge to try and reduce the risk of developing clots in the legs (DVT)

A dressing (also known as a pack) will often be inserted at the end of the operation to provide some pressure to the skin edges to reduce the risk of bleeding. This is normally removed the day after surgery. You will also have a catheter in the bladder which drains urine away for 24-48 hours after surgery.

### WILL I BE IN A LOT OF PAIN?

You will be given very good pain killers by the anaesthetist at the time of the operation. Analgesia will also be given to you on the ward after surgery. It is normal to have some discomfort after the operation, particularly if you had a posterior vaginal wall repair. This tends to improve quite quickly in the days following surgery although it is quite normal to have some ongoing discomfort from the vagina in the few weeks after discharge.

### HOW LONG WILL I BE IN HOSPITAL?

Most patients are in hospital for three to four days, although if you only have a minor vaginal repair you may be able to go home after 24-48 hours or even less.

## **HOW QUICKLY WILL I RECOVER?**

At the time of discharge from hospital most ladies will be able to be mobile and self caring. You should be able to pass urine normally but it is quite common for the bowels to take a little while to settle down into their usual pattern. It is not essential to have a bowel movement before discharge but some patients prefer to make sure that their bowels have been open before going home - most ladies won't have their bowels open until at least two to three days after surgery and sometimes laxatives or suppositories are required.

Most patients find that tiredness is the main problem after discharge from hospital. This is probably just the body slowing you down to stop you overdoing it while it recovers from the surgery. Gradually you will get your energy levels back but it will probably take four weeks after a vaginal repair and six to eight weeks after a vaginal hysterectomy to feel back to normal.

Light housework activities can be resumed very quickly but it is important to avoid heavy lifting for six weeks following surgery. As a general guide, it is fine to lift a kettle full of water but you should probably seek help with lifting heavier objects, such as shopping bags and the Hoover!

It is quite common to have some discomfort from the vagina while it is healing but most patients will find that regular Paracetamol is sufficient to control this by the time they go home. You will be discharged on stronger pain killers to take if necessary. Some patients have a small amount of vaginal bleeding and discharge which normally continues until the stitches in the vagina have dissolved completely, which would normally take six weeks (if you had an anterior vaginal repair, a different type of stitch is used in the vagina and this can take approximately ten weeks to dissolve completely).

## **WHEN CAN I RETURN TO WORK?**

This depends on the type of job you have. Most women are able to return to work four weeks after having a vaginal repair or six to eight weeks after a vaginal hysterectomy but if you have a job which involves heavy lifting or standing for long periods you may need a little longer at home. If you feel well and really need to get back to work as quickly as possible (perhaps because you have your own business) then it is fine to go back earlier but you will need to be aware that you will feel tired, heavy lifting must still be avoided and also a long time spent on your feet can cause some aching or heaviness in the vagina.

## **WHEN CAN I DRIVE AGAIN?**

You can return to driving as soon as you have the energy and concentration to drive safely. You should sit in your car and practice doing an emergency stop and as long as this doesn't hurt you should be safe to go back on the road. It is important to inform your insurance company that you have had an operation and that you have been given permission to start driving again, just to make sure you are adequately covered.

## **WHEN CAN I HAVE A SHOWER OR BATH?**

It is probably better to have a shower rather than a bath for first three to four days after your surgery. You can start doing this from the day after your operation if you feel well enough. If you don't have a shower then it is fine to take a bath but it is important not to spend too long in the water initially as this will soak the stitches - in general terms as more weeks pass from the time of the operation you can stay in the bath for longer. There is no need to add salt to the water.

## **WHEN CAN I HAVE INTERCOURSE AGAIN?**

The stitches in the vagina take approximately six weeks to dissolve and it is, therefore, better to avoid having intercourse for this length of time following surgery. In reality, most women don't really have the energy or confidence to have intercourse until they come for a check up but it is fine to try just gently in the days before your appointment if you wish.

## **WHEN CAN I START TO EXERCISE?**

Light exercise, such as walking, can be started very quickly and gradually be built up over a few weeks. It is better to avoid high impact exercises such as running for six weeks following surgery. You shouldn't go swimming for six weeks - if you are still having some vaginal discharge at this stage, you need to wait until this settles down completely.

## **DO I NEED TO DO ANY PELVIC FLOOR EXERCISES?**

Don't worry about trying to do any pelvic floor exercises in the first few days after the operation - if you do them then you are likely to make yourself quite sore. Trying to stop your urinary flow midstream is no longer recommended. In the weeks following either vaginal repair or vaginal hysterectomy, it may be of value to do some pelvic floor exercises but there isn't really much scientific evidence to show if they are of any benefit. As a guide, it may be worth trying to perform 5-10 quick contractions and 5-10 contractions where you hold for longer three times per day, but if you forget to do them there is no need to worry. In addition, if you find they are making you sore then please stop.

Please don't be surprised if you receive conflicting evidence about doing pelvic floor exercises while you are recovering. As there isn't really much scientific research to guide us, advice is often a matter of personal opinion which, of course, can vary between individual doctors and physiotherapists.

## **WHEN CAN I TRAVEL OR FLY?**

Although there is no physical reason why you cannot fly immediately after your operation, it is normally better to stay in the local area for a couple of weeks following surgery just to make sure you don't develop any problems. If you do need to travel abroad in the six weeks following operation, you need to be aware that you are still at slightly increased risk of having a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). With this in mind it would probably be sensible to keep well hydrated on the plane, move around as much as possible and probably wear some TED stockings. If you are overweight, have varicose veins or a history of previous DVT, then you may need a low dose of aspirin - please seek advice from your GP in these circumstances.

## **DO MY STITCHES NEED TO BE REMOVED?**

The stitches in the vagina all dissolve on their own and do not need to be taken out. If you have had a posterior vaginal wall repair, there are often some small stitches placed between the vagina and bottom which will dissolve after approximately two weeks. However the main stitches in the vagina will take approximately six weeks to dissolve - you may or may not see them come away on a pad or in the bath, etc.

## **WILL I NEED TO BE REVIEWED IN THE OUT PATIENTS?**

You are normally seen for review six to eight weeks following your surgery.

## COMMON PROBLEMS

1. **TIREDFNESS.** It is normal to feel very tired after the operation and many women need to have a sleep during the day. Please don't spend the whole time in bed or a chair when you get home as this will increase the risk of DVT. Gradually try to build up your activities as this will make you feel better and reduce the risk of having clots in your legs. Quite often ladies feel particularly well and do quite a lot on one day and then feel a little more tired the day after, but generally patients feel stronger as the weeks go by following surgery.
2. **CONSTIPATION.** Vaginal surgery, a change in diet, pain killers and immobility all contribute to the risk of developing constipation. Your bowels will settle down into their normal pattern eventually but this may not be until a couple of weeks following surgery. Please try to drink a reasonable amount of fluid, have plenty of fruit/fibre and only use codeine-based pain killers (for example Codydramol or CoCodamol) if you need them. Over the counter preparations can help but if you have any particular problems then your GP should be happy to provide you with laxatives. If you are concerned about your bowels following discharge, please contact the ward where you had your operation to discuss the possibility of coming back for some suppositories.
3. **URINARY TRACT INFECTION.** You will have been given some antibiotics at the time of your operation and at least two further doses of antibiotics following surgery. Despite this it is still quite common to have a urinary tract infection in the few weeks following any operation on the vagina. If this occurs you may go to the toilet very frequently during the day and at night and have some burning or stinging. It is important to drink several extra cups of fluid each day and if the problem persists either contact the gynaecological ward or your GP. A urine sample will be taken and you will probably be started on some antibiotics.
4. **VAGINAL INFECTION.** Despite being given antibiotics at the time of surgery, it is common to develop an infection in the vagina despite using your very best personal hygiene. In response to surgery or the stitches in the vagina, there may be an overgrowth of the natural bacteria which live in the vagina. If this occurs then you will start to become sore, an offensive discharge may develop and sometimes you will have some vaginal bleeding. Sometimes you may not feel as well in yourself and perhaps develop some pelvic discomfort. If you are concerned you may have an infection, please contact your GP who will probably take a vaginal swab and start you on some antibiotics.

**CONTACT NUMBERS:** If you are having problems following your vaginal repair or vaginal hysterectomy and would like extra help or advice, then please contact one of the following numbers:

Spire Harpenden:	Ambrose Ward	-	01582 714427
	Westfield Ward	-	01582 714428
Spire Bushey:	Lee Ward	-	0208 901 5540
	Gade Ward	-	0208 950 5544

If you would like any further information then please contact my secretary Margaret who is on 01727 730892 or [Margaret@hertsgynae.com](mailto:Margaret@hertsgynae.com).

**AH : April 2009**