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Write questions or notes here:

Document Title:

**Post Discharge Information – Oesophagectomy and
Gastrectomy**

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This information document will give you advice to help you to recover.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your doctor or the healthcare team before you go home.

Why do I feel so tired?

It is usual to feel tired after a major operation and this may last for several months. A short nap may help but do not sleep for too long during the day as this may disturb your sleep pattern. Make sure you get a good balance between rest and exercise.

It is common to have poor concentration and to feel low or depressed after major surgery. This may last for some weeks and may affect your appetite and sleeping.

Do I need painkillers?

For several weeks you may get some pain or discomfort. You will be given painkillers according to your needs (just one kind, or a combination of two, three or even four). Each painkiller will have a label clearly explaining how to take it.

If your pain is not relieved enough, contact your GP for advice.

As your pain gets less, you can start to reduce the amount of painkillers you take. Stopping can take weeks or several months. Contact your GP for advice.

Will I need to change my diet?

Your stomach will have been either removed or made smaller by the operation so you do not have the same capacity as before. Also, the operation may have had to involve cutting the vagus nerve, which controls the relaxing of your stomach wall. Eat small amounts regularly, keeping upright for at least 30 minutes afterwards. You may find it helpful not to drink shortly before a meal as this could leave you feeling too full to eat.

A dietician will give you advice before you go home.

Why do I feel faint or dizzy?

After the operation food can move more quickly than normal into your bowels (dumping syndrome) and can cause the following problems.

- Fluid may drain from surrounding organs and tissues making your blood pressure drop and causing you to feel faint or dizzy. This usually gets better within a few months. It will help to eat slowly and to rest for 10 to 15 minutes after eating.

- Your body may absorb sugar quickly into your blood and then over-react by releasing too much insulin, a hormone that forces your body to store sugar in your liver and muscles. A low blood-sugar level can make you feel faint or dizzy. It will help to eat food low in sugar. If you feel faint or dizzy after eating, contact your GP for advice.

Why do I have diarrhoea?

If the operation involved cutting the vagus nerve, you may get loose bowel movements or diarrhoea.

Anti-diarrhoea medication may help if this happens, so contact your pharmacist or GP for advice.

What should I do about my wound?

If you have any dressings that need to be changed or stitches that need to be removed, the healthcare team will arrange for a district nurse to call at your home.

You can have a bath or shower. Do not use any creams or powders directly on your wound until it has healed well.

If your wound becomes sore or red or begins to leak, contact your GP or district nurse.

You can expect some soreness around your wound for several weeks. Keep taking painkillers regularly to ease the discomfort.

What do I do with the feeding tube (jejunostomy)?

It is common to go home with the feeding tube still in place. Continue to 'flush' the tube twice a day using cooled boiled water. Use a new syringe each time.

Once you no longer need the tube, it will be removed either by the district nurse or when you go to the clinic.

Can I take my medication as normal?

You will have been given all your essential medication while in hospital. Some of your usual medication may have been stopped until you are able to take it by mouth again. You may need to take it as a liquid for a short time.

When you go home, you will be given extra medication such as painkillers and anti-sickness medication. Your doctor at hospital will write the prescription. This prescription will also let your GP know about any changes that were made to your medication while you were in hospital. The pharmacist will make sure you have enough medication to take home. You will need to get further supplies through your GP. If you brought your own medication into hospital, the healthcare team will return it to you if the medication is suitable.

Exercising

• Should I do any exercises?

Gentle exercise will benefit you in the following ways.

- Help to speed up your recovery.
- Help you to get back to the activities you enjoyed before the operation.
- Improve your confidence.
- Increase the amount you can exercise.
- Reduce stress.

• What exercise should I do?

Walking is the best form of exercise. When you go home it is safe to walk outside, gradually increasing the distance and speed that you walk. On wet days, walking up and down the stairs is a good alternative.

Start gently and increase slowly.

Continue with the breathing exercises (deep breathing, huffing and coughing) that the healthcare team taught you. Keep an upright posture, resisting the tendency to lean to the side of the operation. Continue gentle arm stretches to prevent your shoulder from getting stiff.

• How hard should I exercise?

Remember to listen to your body. Exercise as hard as you feel comfortable with each day. It is normal to become short of breath, to feel warm or for your heart to beat faster. This shows you are working. You should not feel sick or faint, or feel so tired that you need to sleep after exercising, or be so short of breath that you cannot talk.

• How can I increase my exercise?

It is important that you increase your fitness gradually, starting from the level you were at in hospital. You can build from there.

- Increase the time you exercise for.

- Increase the distance you walk or number of repetitions of each exercise.
 - Increase the pace (speed) you work at.
 - Increase the number of exercise sessions you do each week.
- Change only one of these at a time.

• How can I take care while exercising?

- Start slowly and finish slowly, allowing your body to warm up and cool down.
- Wear loose clothing and sensible footwear.
- Take notice of the weather. If it is wet, cold or windy, you may need to lessen what you do or exercise indoors.
- Do not exercise if you feel unwell.
- Do not swim until your wound is fully healed.
- Do not do strenuous exercise that involves heavy lifting or straining, or exercise that makes you breathless, such as digging in the garden or vacuuming.

Returning to normal activities

Aim to get back to the activities of daily life gently and gradually. In activities such as walking, light shopping, household chores and sex, you should find yourself becoming stronger and more active each week.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check with your doctor and insurance company first.

When will I be seen in the clinic?

The healthcare team will arrange for you to come back to the clinic within 6 weeks. If you have any problems before this clinic, either contact your GP, who can contact the hospital doctors, or contact the ward, where the healthcare team can help you.

The healthcare team will arrange for you to come back to the clinic regularly, usually every three months.

Keep this information leaflet. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Acknowledgements

Author: Eleanor Douglas BSc (Hons) Physiotherapy MCSP and Mr Simon Parsons DM FRCS (Gen. Surg.)

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.