



MOVING ON

RECOVERING FROM MAJOR SURGERY

The common misconception with surgery is that we go in and get fixed and all will be well. Unfortunately, human beings are not machines. There is fear of pain and the real pain itself, and the feeling of never being the same again. There are pre-surgery anxieties about things going wrong or whether you can cope with any post-surgery changes. Then there is the question of care—who will be there for you, with you, while you are recuperating.

Some surgeries may fix things, other surgeries change us so drastically physically. There are times when surgeries are completely unexpected and leave us reeling from the shock of losing something within, and having to deal with the aftermath of physical and emotional scars.

Often, changes in our lives take place before surgery as preparations are made. We talk about some of the challenges that individuals face may before and after surgery and offer useful tips to help you overcome those challenges.

Before Surgery

Challenge: Fears and Worries

Some individuals may worry about the success or failure of the surgery. Others may be concerned about side effects or impact to their daily life and function. It gets more confusing when we hear conflicting information or “stories” from different people or websites. These fears are legitimate; after all our body, health and life may be impacted. However, we must be careful not to allow them to consume us and affect our quality of life.

Solution: Research and Clarify with Experts

Uncertainty, worries and concerns tend to feed more confusion and fears. The best way to manage them is to adopt the attitude of a scientist and find out the answers in an objective manner from the experts already working with you. Your healthcare professionals are the best experts. They know your condition the best, and they are able to clarify the accuracy and relevance of information. You may want to jot down your concerns and queries on your phone or a piece of paper and show it to your healthcare team on your next visit.

Challenge: Anxiety over Impending Change

Some surgeries may change certain aspects of our lives. We may not be able to eat certain types of food or do certain activities or perform certain functions after surgery. Some may be temporary, others may be permanent. As a result, some individuals may want to eat more of certain food or do more of certain activities.

Solution: Use Our Health as Focus and Acknowledge What Remains

While we may want to engage in certain behaviours before surgery, we do not want to lose sight of our goal. Should we eat something in excess if it is not healthy for us in the long run? Would it not defeat the goal of the surgery which is to make us well and healthier? It may be helpful to look beyond the temporary or permanent loss.

After Surgery

Challenge: Feeling Weak, Helpless, Discomfort and Pain

During the initial period after surgery, some of us may feel weak and experience a considerable amount of discomfort and even pain. For those with wounds, we may be concerned about aggravating the wound. We may feel frustrated that our diet and movements are restricted. Our sleep may be disrupted for many reasons.

Solution: Know the Signs to Look Out for and Get Help from Others

Before you leave the hospital, ask a lot of questions, such as what signs to look out for that indicate that you need to seek immediate medical attention. Where do you go or whom do you turn to in case of emergencies? Ask others to support you for the time being while you recover from surgery. Recognise that you will eventually work your way towards being more independent and restoring your health as best as you can.

Challenge: Body Changes

Some surgeries may leave our body changed in a certain way. Some of these body changes could affect the way we look. Or it could affect the way we do things. Some of these changes may be felt only at certain moments. These body changes can make us feel self-conscious and vulnerable at times.

Solution: You are More Than This

Recognise that you are more and bigger than your physical self. Some of the physical changes may make you more dependent on others, and it is not a sign of weakness, or a burden. It is just a different way of functioning that you may still be figuring out for the moment. Deep inside you, you are still the same you, regardless of the state of your health or body. Going through surgery is a tough journey. Be kind to yourself. Treat yourself as you would towards a friend who is recovering from a surgery. The journey may not be easy, but you are more than the journey.