

A Helpful Guide Before & After Surgery

Things you never thought of and more. I wish I'd had this guide before my own surgeries.

* **Delegate, delegate, delegate.** It's too overwhelming to remember all the things you want to do or need to take care of. The only thing you should have to remember is to rest and be good to yourself. You'll be amazed by the number of people (even friends of friends you've never met before) who'll offer to help. Take advantage of their generous offers.

* **Assign someone to be in charge of delegating everything.** This includes having someone be responsible for taking care of your pets, picking up the mail and meal delivery. When I first returned home, we had 2-3 meals arriving daily. It's too much all at once. I quickly learned to kindly ask those that wanted to bring meals to spread it out a bit.

* Also, don't forget to have someone **record a message on the answering machine and send texts/emails/Facebook updates** to provide updates after surgery and during your recovery. It was too draining to take calls and respond to emails right away.

* I wanted to **thank everyone** for helping, but my writing was sloppy and my thought process was slow. A friend of

mine offered to keep track of everyone who sent flowers, brought food over, shoveled the drive, etc., while another friend wrote thank you notes for me. I can't tell you how much this helped and gave me a sense of relief that I wasn't neglecting everyone who helped in my recovery.

* **Get a notebook with dividers and pockets.** This was really helpful for me. As an organized (ok, anal retentive, Type A, OCD!!! 🤪), person I found it very frustrating that I didn't have the energy or concentration to stay organized after surgery. The notebook was great for keeping all the important #'s together, a schedule of follow up doctor's appointments and a place to record questions or concerns I didn't want to forget to ask my doctors. A hospital map and hotel information is great for out-of-town family, friends and caregivers.

* **Bring someone to each doctor's appointment.** It was a relief to know that if I forgot what my doctor's instructions were that my best friend(who took me to my follow ups) had taken notes that I could review when I returned home. Also ask your doctor or doctors if you may bring a tape recorder to record the discussion as you may hear things differently from whoever is with you.

* **Draw up a meds chart.** I had a hard time remembering when and how many of which pill I needed to take after surgery. One was 3 times a day, another was 2 pills every 8 hours,--you get the gist. I had a chart drawn up with a box

to check off after I'd taken each dose. You could also invest in a **watch with multiple alarms** as a reminder to take medications.

* **Be good to yourself.** I can't emphasize this enough. My best friend took me to the mall for a make-over. It gave me the boost I needed! Invest in a few pairs of sweats and pajamas (less fumbling if you avoid clothing with buttons and zippers for awhile) and fun slippers to make yourself more comfortable.

Wear wireless bras if you don't mind that floppy feeling for a few days.

Don't forget simple indulgences like a manicure, your favorite tea or coffee, scented lotions and bubble baths.

* **Remember your caregivers.** They need an outlet too. Encourage them to go out with friends, get a massage, leave the house. When they've had a mental and physical break, their batteries will be recharged and better equipped to take care of you.

* **Get fit!**

Before surgery—Now is the time to walk, run, work out with weights and maintain a healthy diet. Try to relax too. Prepare to be well. Turn down any obligations you can; use this tumor to create a happy space in your life to take

care of yourself.

* **Set up a web page.** Caring Bridge, Facebook, Instagram, even Twitter! Many hospitals offer this service for family and friends. It's a great help to reduce stress in communications & a stress-free way to catch up at your leisure.

* **While in ICU:** Try coffee with your Vicodan--yummy! Caffeine helps the narcotic work.

* **Stay hydrated.** Bring nice lip balm (I love Burt's Bees), which is aromatherapy and it helps those poor dry lips. Drink as much water as you can too.

* **Get active in bed.** Well not that kind of active! 🤖 Ask the nurses to explain what you may and may not do. Even with electric compression stockings you can point toes, perform small range leg exercises and take small walks. Walk as soon as you can. Remember, the key is to get active!

* A **cold washcloth** felt amazing on my neck! I hung one on my side rail, one on neck, rotated them all night. Cold cloth over my eyes was very satisfying too.

* **Spirometer:** A little breathing exercise to expand your lungs. If they don't give you one, ask why not.

* **Earplugs:** Yes, I used these and it cut down on the

overbearing ICU noises.

* **Be grateful.** I prayed and thanked God for my situation, while making vows I plan to keep.

* **Slowly** turn your head every time you are too comfortable. Remember to take baby steps--it'll expedite your physical recovery.

* Back home—**avoid the same position** for more than a couple hours. After you stop taking Decadron, your cerebral edema is on its own. My only pain was when I tried to lower my head for too long.

* **Set your own pace:** Don't feel obligated to long visits with well-meaning family members and friends. Conserve what little energy you have.

* **Surround yourself with people you love** and who help you feel safe to be there right after the surgery, and to have them visit you in the morning when you wake up.

* I had my husband **sing** with me before I was given the anesthesia. It really helped to make me feel more relaxed and safe. He also sang to me when I came out of surgery. I found it very reassuring.

* Have people bring you **real food** from the outside world. The hospital can be a somewhat surreal place; make it

human.

* Since we have to keep our **heads elevated** after surgery and most hospital pillows are so bulky and uncomfortable, I used a hospital blanket and folded it up to use as a pillow. Much better and you can do this at home too.

* For possible **balance/dizziness issues** post-op, purchase a stool (Home Depot, Lowes, Ace Hardware...) for the shower. You may want a showerhead attachment with a flexible hose as well.

* Make a list of all of your **bills**, how much to pay and when they are due. Delegate that to your caregiver.

* Also, make a **master list** of all PIN numbers, phone numbers, combinations to locks, etc...
I could not remember any of these things and was too embarrassed to tell anyone.

* Keep a **calendar** by your side. I over-committed to things for a very long time. My short term memory wasn't very good. I live off of my calendar and it is easier to live by my computer calendar rather than writing. My writing is not the same.

* The **location of my tumor** affected my right hand fine motor skills. So I use my OUTLOOK calendar for everything. It reminds me of everything--meetings, when to pay bills,

phone numbers...all in one place.

* I find that if I **organize** it that way I have less anxiety about forgetting things. My computer has been my best friend. On a funny note my staff understands that I need everything electronically because I lose paper.

* I did **little things** like clean cupboards/closets, thinking if someone had to find something for me I didn't want all my drawers looking like "junk" drawers. Basically, like nesting before the birth of a child. I've had 2 surgeries and one thing I did before my second was to schedule some bill payments ahead on line for the next 2-3 weeks after surgery. I handle that task in our house & for our business, I didn't want to worry about it or for my husband to either.

* Another was to **write notes** to my parents, husband & kids, telling them how much I appreciated their support, their love and how much I loved them and to let them know we'd get through this together. With all the waivers you have to sign & knowing the risks involved I didn't want things to go unsaid.

* So my point is, try to get a few things done **ahead of time** so you can focus on your recovery when you get home.

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