

Early Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) - our multimodal perioperative care pathway.

Early Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) protocols have been designed to help you recover quickly and safely after your surgery. We recognise having major bowel surgery can be anxiety provoking and hope these guidelines help you understand and set your own expectations for your peri-operative care. They are general in nature and modified as needed on a case-by-case basis to ensure you receive personalised care, underpinned by the latest evidence in colorectal surgery.

The key areas we focus on in our ERAS program are:

1. Avoiding prolonged periods of fasting prior to surgery and reintroducing a normal diet rapidly.

We encourage our patients to eat a normal healthy diet up to 6 hours prior to your surgery and drink an energy rich drink which you will be given up to 2 hours prior to your surgery. The physical insult of having a major bowel operation is similar to running a marathon, and you would not do this on an empty stomach! Having energy and nutrition in your system provides your body and cells with the energy they need to respond to and recover from your surgery.

After surgery, your surgeon will determine the safest and best diet for you. Often this involves the early resumption of a normal diet. Usually it is our patients who are the best determinants of what they feel they can tolerate orally, so if you can manage a full diet by all means do so. If you are feeling nauseous or bloated back off a bit and just stick with simple soft foods or even just fluids. Sometimes if your surgeon feels it is not safe to eat immediately after your surgery you will be kept off food whilst your gut function recovers.

2. Minimally invasive surgical approaches.

Such as small incisions, keyhole surgery, avoiding drains and stomas (where possible). These are the technical aspects of your surgery that make a major difference to your outcome. Choosing your surgeon and ensuring they offer the best techniques using the latest equipment facilitates your best outcomes. At the Specialist Centre Ballarat we pride ourselves on our technical outcomes.

3. Keeping fluid input to a minimum throughout your procedure and afterwards on the ward.

This part of your recovery will be generally managed by your surgeon and anaesthetist. Your body is the best at managing the intricate task of fluid and electrolyte balance. Where possible we encourage oral intake of fluids - sipping on fluids as needed after surgery. Occasionally we may need to supplement this with intravenous fluids (a drip) but where possible we will avoid this to allow early mobilisation and avoid the consequences of fluid overload on your lungs and on the join in your bowel.

4. Return of normal bowel function.

We encourage chewing gum after your surgery to help to stimulate gut function – bring a few packets of your favorite gum with you to chew after your surgery.

The people that do the best after bowel surgery are those that get up and move around their room or the ward as soon as possible after surgery. This is usually done with the assistance of a physiotherapist or nurse, and usually occurs on day 1 after your operation. You should have enough painkillers on board to move freely and take deep breaths. Movement helps the gut recover its normal peristalsis (which is the squeezing motion that moves food through your gut).

Depending on your surgery you may or may not have to take 'bowel prep' prior to your surgery to empty the bowel of faeces. This will be directed by your surgeon. If you have had bowel prep it can take some days for the bowel to re-fill with faeces and will depend on what volumes of food you are eating. It is not necessary to have a bowel motion prior to leaving hospital. Passing wind is a helpful sign your bowel movement (peristalsis) is recovering.

5. Being comfortable to move around after your surgery and manage pain with tablets.

Your pain management will be managed predominantly by your anaesthetist and may include regional anaesthesia techniques (a spinal injection of pain relief medication before you go off to sleep which lasts up to 24 hours) and a PCA (patient controlled analgesia).

You need to ensure you are comfortable enough to take deep breaths and move around your room to get to the toilet and sit out of bed in a chair. If you cannot do this we would encourage you to ask your nurse for more pain relief. You will be offered a combination of regular pain relief and 'break through' pain relief. We find we can achieve the best outcomes if patients take paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medicines (eg ibuprofen) regularly and then use stronger medications as needed to take away any pain that these do not cover.

Sometimes patients return to the ward with a PCA which means that you can press the button and deliver a dose of intravenous pain killer medicine through the drip. The doses and frequency of delivery are determined by your anaesthetists so you cannot 'over dose'. PCAs are very helpful when needed but we try to stop them when possible to allow you to manage your pain with oral medications alone so we can get you home quickly after your surgery. We pride ourselves on our nursing care and strive to create a comfortable environment for you whilst in hospital, but when it is safe and convenient to do so, we encourage our patients to recover in their own home with their own bed, access to food, and family to support them. If there are any issues with this we have fantastic nursing staff, discharge planners, and inpatient rehabilitation facilities that can assist.

If you have a catheter (drain tube) in your bladder to drain urine and monitor your fluid balance this is likely to be removed day 1 (or as early as safe to do so after surgery) to allow you to move around freely and allow your body to maintain a normal fluid balance.

We work closely with the team at the Anaesthetic Group Ballarat (AGB) to implement our ERAS program and have a dedicated surgical ward at St John of God Hospital Ballarat that offers excellent nursing care, physiotherapists, stomal therapists, dieticians and pharmacists who will ensure your hospital stay is as calm and comfortable as possible.

