

symptoms after surgery

You did it! Congratulations on your first step towards a healthy active lifestyle. After your weight-loss procedure, St. Vincent's bariatric surgeons and staff are here if you need us. To help with your recovery, we've listed normal symptoms you might experience and how to deal with these issues.

COMMON & NORMAL SYMPTOMS

You can expect to experience one or more of the following symptoms after surgery. Please follow the advice outlined below and contact us if you are still concerned or if symptoms worsen over time.

Swelling and Bruising: Moderate swelling and bruising are normal after any surgery.

- Severe swelling and bruising may indicate bleeding or possible infection. Notify your surgeon if this occurs.

Discomfort and Pain: Mild to moderate discomfort or pain is normal after any surgery.

- If the pain becomes severe and is not relieved by pain medication, please contact your weight loss surgeon.

Numbness: Small sensory nerves to the skin surface are occasionally cut when the incisions are made or interrupted by undermining of the skin during surgery. The sensation in those areas gradually returns, usually within 2 to 3 months as the nerve endings heal spontaneously.

- Because of some post-operative numbness, it is best to avoid heating pads until you heal.

Itching: Itching and occasional small shooting electrical sensations within the skin frequently occur as the nerve endings heal. These symptoms are common during the recovery period.

- Ice, skin moisturizers, vitamin E oil and massage are often helpful.

warning signs to watch for

Please notify your surgeon's office immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Fever (101°F or above)
- Redness, swelling, increased pain and/or pus-like drainage from your wound.
- Chest pain and/or shortness of breath.
- Nausea and/or vomiting that lasts more than 12 hours.
- Pain, redness and/or swelling in your legs.
- Urine output fewer than four times in 24 hours.
- Pain that is unrelieved by pain medication.

Redness of Scars: All new scars are red, dark pink or purple. The scars take about a year to fade.

- Protect your scars from the sun for a year after your surgery.
- Even through a bathing suit, a good deal of sunlight can reach the skin and cause damage. Wear a sunscreen with a skin-protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 when out in sunny weather.

Nausea: Nausea can be related to insufficient chewing, fullness, sensitivity to odors, pain medication, not eating, post-nasal drip or dehydration. Nausea that occurs in the first days after weight loss surgery can be suppressed with medications called anti-emetics.

- In unusual cases, the nausea can be so severe that it prevents patients from taking in adequate amounts of liquids. If this happens you need to come back to the Medical Center to receive intravenous fluids.
- Call the office if nausea is lasting more than 12 hours. Persistent vomiting can lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, and vitamin deficiencies.

Vomiting: Vomiting is often times associated with eating inappropriately. In the beginning, it may be difficult to gauge how little food will satisfy your hunger.

- Chew your food well, keep it moist and eat only half of what you anticipate eating. If there is still space, and you still feel hungry, you can always eat a little more. A couple of teaspoons may be all that you can take in at one time.
- Sometimes fullness occurs quickly. Allow yourself time to recognize the feeling of fullness. Typically, a profound feeling of satisfaction follows the fullness within a few minutes, and makes you uninterested in eating more.

Should you have difficulty swallowing foods or keeping foods down, please call your surgeon. Vomiting may indicate that the stomach pouch is blocked. If vomiting continues for more than 24 hours, contact your surgeon to avoid severe dehydration due to vomiting.

helpful tips for nausea

- Avoid perfumes and scented lotions. If food odors bother you, try to have someone else prepare your meals or prepare bland foods. Inhaling peppermint essential oil on a handkerchief can also be helpful.
- Learn to recognize when you are full. This will not happen immediately, but by eating very slowly, it will become easier.
- Try ginger, peppermint tea, fennel tea, decaffeinated green tea or water with lemon (hot or cold.) You can also suck on a cinnamon stick.
- Take nausea medicine as prescribed. If you believe that your pain medication is the cause of your nausea, call your surgeon's office to have the prescription changed.
- Staying hydrated will also help—fluids should be continuously sipped all day to prevent dehydration. You need a minimum of 64 oz. of fluids per day. Increase by 20% if you are sweating.

Dehydration: Dehydration occurs if you do not drink enough fluids. Symptoms include fatigue, dark colored urine, dizziness, fainting, nausea, low back pain (a constant dull ache across the back), and a whitish coating on the tongue. Blood work should be done if these symptoms persist, in order to establish the severity of dehydration.

Dehydration may lead to bladder and kidney infections. Contact your surgeon if you believe that you may be dehydrated. In some cases you will need to be admitted to the hospital so that fluids can be administered. Note: If your urine is dark and your mouth is dry, you are not drinking enough.

Bowel Habits: At first, it will be normal for you to have one to three bowel movements of soft stool per day. It may be foul smelling and associated with flatulence. Most of these changes resolve as your body heals and you adapt to changes. Please call your surgeon should you have persistent diarrhea.

helpful tips for preventing dehydration

- Buy a sports bottle and take it with you so you can sip water all day.
- Drink at least 64 oz. of fluids per day. Increase this amount if you are sweating.
- Avoid caffeine-containing beverages – they are diuretics and can dehydrate you. Unsweetened herbal iced tea is okay to use.
- If you have difficulties drinking due to nausea, suck on ice chips.

helpful tips for reducing vomiting

- Don't eat too fast.
- Chew your food properly.
- Avoid food that is too dry.
- Don't eat too much food at once.
- Slowly reintroduce solid food after surgery as tolerated.
- Avoid drinking liquids either with meals or right after meals.
- Avoid drinking with a straw.
- Don't lie down after a meal.
- Do not eat foods that disagree with you; keep a food log.
- If vomiting continues throughout the day, stop eating solid foods and sip clear liquids (clear and very diluted juice, broth and herbal tea).

helpful tips for bowel health

- Lactose intolerance and high fat intake are generally the culprits of loose stools and diarrhea. Avoid all high fat foods and discontinue the use of all cow milk products. Yogurt is okay.
- Use a journal to help recognize problem foods.
- Take ¼ of the recommended dose Citrucel® (unsweetened) for regularity.

After weight-loss surgery, the amount of food consumed is greatly reduced, and the quantity of fiber or roughage consumed may be much smaller. Correspondingly, the number of bowel movements will be diminished, causing less frequent bowel activity, and sometimes constipation. If this becomes a problem, a stool softener may be indicated to avoid rectal difficulties.

Try to keep your bowel movements regular. Your stools may be soft until you eat more solid food. If cramping and loose stools (more than 3 per day) or constipation persist for more than two days, please call your surgeon's office.

Dumping Syndrome: Sugar may cause "dumping syndrome" in patients who have had the gastric bypass procedure. Dumping occurs when sugars go directly from your stomach pouch into the small intestine causing heart palpitations, nausea, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. Symptoms may vary among patients. Dumping lasts about 30 minutes to an hour. To prevent dumping syndrome, avoid foods and drinks which contain sugar.

Flatulence: Everyone has gas in the digestive tract. Bariatric patients who have had Gastric Bypass have a shortened bowel, thus causing gas to be more odorous and expelled more forcefully. Gas comes from two main sources: swallowed air and normal breakdown of certain foods by harmless bacteria that is naturally present in the large intestines.

Many carbohydrate foods cause gas; fat and protein very little. The foods that are known to cause more gas are beans, veggies, some fruits, soft drinks, whole grains/wheat and bran, cows' milk and cows' milk products, foods containing sorbitol and dietetic products.

Transient Hair Loss/Skin Changes: Hair thinning or loss is expected after rapid weight loss, and is temporary. Unfortunately, that does not make it any less disheartening.

During the phase of rapid weight loss, calorie intake is much less than the body needs, and protein intake is marginal. The body is in a state of starvation. One of the side-effects is hair thinning or hair loss. This is a transient effect and resolves when nutrition and weight stabilize.

The hair loss usually occurs anywhere from 3 to 9 months after surgery. For the same reason, skin texture and appearance may change.

helpful tips for reducing flatulence

- Eat your meals more slowly, chewing food thoroughly.
- Lactose intolerance can be the culprit of gas, too. Discontinue the use of all cow milk products. Yogurt is okay.
- Avoid chewing gum and hard candy.
- Avoid drinking with a straw.
- Eliminate carbonated beverages.
- Remedies include Lactobacillus acidophilus, natural chlorophyll, and simethicone.

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ST. VINCENT'S MEDICAL CENTER: A LEADER IN WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY

At St. Vincent's state-of-the-art, comprehensive Bariatric Surgery Center, it is our responsibility to educate and support each individual's medical, surgical and emotional needs. The success of our Bariatric Weight Loss program is greatly enhanced by our counseling in the nutrition, exercise and psychosocial aspects of obesity.

Don't wait for weight-loss – learn more and know your options now by [registering for a free, no-obligation, informational seminar](#). [See how other Bariatric Surgery patients achieved their goals.](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT THE
BARIATRIC COORDINATOR AT (203) 576-5431

helpful tips for hair loss and skin changes

- Protein, vitamins and water intake are also important for healthy skin. Minimize the loss of hair by taking your multivitamins daily and making sure that you consume at least 75 grams of protein per day.
- Nioxin® shampoo has been shown helpful for some patients, as well as Biotin (Vitamin H) tablets or powder.
- Avoid hair treatments and permanents – there's no need to stress your hair from the outside during your recovery period.