



# Post-operative recovery guide for living liver Donors: transitioning from hospital to home

## 1. Introduction

Welcome to the next stage of your recovery. Now that your operation is complete and you have made an excellent initial recovery, we are ready for you to return home. It is completely normal to feel a sense of uncertainty as you transition away from the hospital environment, but please be assured that our team is here to support you throughout this journey. This guide serves as your definitive reference to address common concerns and provide clear clinical guidance during your recuperation.

## 2. Physical expectations during early recovery

It is important to remember that you have undergone major surgery. Your body requires significant time to heal, and we expect you to experience the following sensations during the early weeks:

- **Pain management:** You may still experience some pain or discomfort at the surgical site. This is normal and should be managed by taking your prescribed pain relief as directed. Staying consistent with your medication will allow you to move more comfortably, which is vital for your physical recovery
- **Fatigue:** Feeling significantly more tired than usual is a standard response to a major surgical procedure. Your energy levels will improve gradually over time as your body recovers

## 3. Wound care and scar management

Proper maintenance of your incision site is essential to prevent complications. We recommend the following care routine:

- **Hygiene:** You must shower rather than take a bath until your wound is completely healed to reduce the risk of infection
- **Stitch removal:** If you have stitches, these will need to be removed two weeks after your surgery. **You are responsible for arranging an appointment with the practice nurse at your local GP surgery for this procedure**
- **Scar reassurance:** While the incision is prominent now, please be reassured that your scar will fade over time
- **Signs of infection:** Monitor your wound daily. You must contact your GP or the Live donor coordinator immediately for an assessment and **possible antibiotics** if you notice:
  - Increased redness around the incision
  - The area feeling hot to the touch
  - New or increased swelling

## 4. Post-operative medication schedule

The following table outlines the medications we will provide upon your discharge. Always follow the specific instructions provided on your dispensing labels.

Medication type	Purpose	Duration/instructions
<b>Oral pain relief</b> (e.g., paracetamol, codeine, tramadol)	To manage post-operative pain and discomfort.	Take as prescribed based on your level of pain.
<b>Acid reflux medication</b>	To prevent gastric irritation.	Take for a duration of two to four–4 weeks.
<b>Blood-thinning injections</b>	To prevent blood clots (DVT).	Administer daily for 2 weeks. Our team will ensure you are trained on self-administration before you leave the hospital.

*Note: Laxatives may also be prescribed on an 'as-needed' basis to prevent or treat constipation.*

## 5. Clinical follow-up timeline

We will continue to monitor your recovery through a series of scheduled reviews:

- **Two weeks post-surgery:** A telephone appointment with the Liver Surgical Team to ensure your recovery is progressing as expected
- **Six weeks post-surgery:** A face-to-face clinical review with the Liver Surgical Team at the hospital
- **Annual review:** Ongoing yearly follow-ups with the live donor coordinator. These reviews allow us to monitor your long-term health and wellbeing, while the data gathered helps us educate and inform future prospective donors

## 6. Urgent warning signs and medical red flags

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you must seek medical attention immediately.

### General complications

- High temperature (fever)
- Persistent diarrhoea or vomiting
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes)

### Critical emergencies

These may indicate a blood clot in the leg (DVT) or lungs (PE):

- Pain, swelling, heat, or redness in your calf or thigh
- Unexpected shortness of breath or chest pain
- Rapid breathing or an abnormally fast heart rate
- Dizziness or fainting

**During office hours (08:00 – 16:00):** Contact the live donor coordinator directly at **0121 371 4530**.

Out-of-hours: Call the QEHB switchboard at 0121 371 2000 and ask to speak to the on-call liver transplant coordinator.

## 7. Lifestyle and activity restrictions

To support liver regeneration and physical healing, we ask that you adhere to the following restrictions:

### Dietary and alcohol

- Eat small, frequent meals rather than a few large portions
- Maintain a **high-protein diet** to provide the necessary nutrients for your liver to regenerate
- **Strictly avoid alcohol** for the first three months following your operation

## Driving

- Do not drive for a minimum of six weeks post-surgery
- You must only return to driving when you can safely perform an emergency stop
- **Clinical tip:** Because the seatbelt rests directly over your incision, you may find it more comfortable to place a small, soft cushion between your wound and the belt
- Consult your insurance provider to confirm you are covered to return to driving, as individual policies vary

## Physical activity

- **Gentle walking:** This is an excellent way to gradually rebuild your fitness. We encourage you to start as soon as you feel ready
- **Swimming:** Avoid swimming until your wound is fully healed to prevent infection
- **Heavy Lifting:** Do not attempt any heavy lifting for the first three months

## Employment

- We generally advise remaining off work for up to three months
- This duration depends on your specific role; those in manual labour or heavy physical roles may require a longer period of absence

## Travel

- Air travel is not recommended for the first two months following surgery
- Inform your travel insurance provider about your surgery; premiums may be affected for up to six months and you must ensure your policy provides appropriate cover

## Sexual health

- You may resume sexual activity as soon as you feel physically ready
- **Contraception and pregnancy:** Avoid taking the contraceptive pill for at least three months post-surgery. You must use alternative contraception and avoid pregnancy during this three-month period.

## 8. Psychological wellbeing

The period following organ donation can be emotionally complex. It is normal to experience a range of emotions while you balance your own recovery with concerns for the recipient's progress. We are here to support your mental health as well as your physical health. If you experience low mood or feel you are struggling to cope, please reach out to the live donor coordinator. Our team can arrange a referral for professional psychological support.

## 9. Essential contact information

For any questions or concerns regarding your recovery, please use the following contact details:

- **Live donor coordinator (direct line):** 0121 371 4530
- **Email:** [liveliverdonor@uhb.nhs.uk](mailto:liveliverdonor@uhb.nhs.uk)
- **Out-of-hours:** 0121 371 2000 (QEHB Switchboard—Request the on-call liver transplant coordinator)

## Accessibility

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