

Medical problem? Call 1800 022 222. If you need urgent medical help, call triple zero immediately. healthdirect Australia is a free service where you can talk to a nurse or doctor who can help you know what to do.

Laparotomy

A laparotomy is an operation to look inside your abdomen, and at the organs there. There are many reasons why this operation might be needed.

Why might a laparotomy be needed?

A laparotomy might be needed to look for problems in the abdomen or internal organs, or to treat a particular condition. For example, it might be done to find out why you have abdominal (tummy) pain, if you have an injury to your abdomen, to look at the spread of certain diseases such as endometriosis and cancer. Sometimes it's done in emergency situations.

A laparotomy needs a fairly large incision in the abdomen. It is different from a laparoscopy, which is keyhole surgery to look into the abdomen.

You should discuss with your doctor why a laparotomy might be necessary.

How to prepare for a laparotomy

You might need to have blood tests or other tests before your surgery. You will be asked to fast (not have anything to eat or drink) on the day of the procedure. Check with your doctor whether you need to stop taking any particular medicines before your surgery.

What happens during a laparotomy?

You will be given a general anaesthetic, so you won't be awake during the surgery. A cut will be made in your abdomen, so the doctor can look inside. Other procedures might be done at the

same time, depending on the type of problem. You should discuss these possibilities with your doctor.

What to expect after a laparotomy

A laparotomy is a significant operation, and recovery will take time. When you wake, you might have a catheter (a tube in your bladder) to help you pass urine. You will be given medicine for pain.

It may be a while before you can eat and drink normally, and you will probably need time off work to recover. You might have

stitches or staples in the wound that will need to be removed. Your doctor can advise you about having this done. You will probably stay in hospital for at least a few days after the surgery.

What can go wrong?

This is usually a safe procedure, but there are some risks. In rare cases, there might be bleeding, or infection, or damage to the organs inside your abdomen. Sometimes people get blood clots after surgery. If you have fever, severe pain, nausea or vomiting, or redness or pus around the wound, you should see a doctor.

Sources:

Mater Mothers' Hospital (Women's health- laparoscopy),
Encyclopaedia of Surgery (Laparotomy, exploratory)

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