Laparotomy, Exploratory Or Staging

A laparotomy is a cut (*incision*) into the belly (*abdominal cavity*). In spite of modern x-rays, laboratory, and other diagnostic studies, the belly sometimes needs to be opened. This helps the caregiver to look and learning what is wrong. The caregiver can use different incisions depending on what will give him or her the best possible look into the abdomen.

REASONS FOR LAPAROTOMY

- It is commonly used following accidents with injury (*trauma*) to the abdomen. This helps the caregiver to see if damage is present. They may also be able to repair it if necessary. Following a trauma emergency, laparotomy is often done to control massive bleeding (*hemorrhage*). This procedure in these circumstances may be life saving. There may not be time for the surgeon to fully discuss this situation with the family or friends, or even the patient.
- Laparotomy may be used to look for causes of fever when the reason for the fever is unknown. It may also be used when an exact reason) in not known.
- Laparotomy is used to *stage* various tumors. This means it can be used to find out how far a disease has developed. An example of this is using laparotomy to see how far Hodgkin's disease or lymphoma has developed. Seeing how far a disease has spread by staging the disease helps the caregiver to decide on the best treatment.
- Exploratory laparotomy may be used in a patient with severe abdominal pain. There may not be time for further diagnositic studies and going to the operating room is the best chance for cure. The surgeon is able to evaluate all of the contents of the abdominal cavity to find out what is causing the problem and intervene.

PROCEDURE

- The abdomen is examined and tissue samples (*biopsies*) are usually taken. Biopsies are small pieces of tissue that the caregiver takes from the abdomen. They are looked at under a microscope. They are looked at by a specialist (*pathologist*). The specialist helps to determine what is wrong. Biopsies are performed for staging procedures only. If your caregiver took biopsies, you should ask how you are to find out about the results. You should ask this before you leave the hospital or surgical center.
- The abdomen is closed up following the laparotomy. This is usually done using staples or stitches. If staples or stitches were used to close the skin, your surgeon will let you know when you are to be seen again to removed the sutures or staples.
- The length of stay in the hospital depends on the procedures performed and the reason for the operation.
- Surgeons are also performing diagnostic and exploratory **laparoscopic** procedures in certain situations. This allows for a minimally invasive approach.

Keep your appointments as directed.

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