



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
FAQ061  
SPECIAL PROCEDURES

## Laparoscopy

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### What is laparoscopy?

Laparoscopy is a way of doing surgery without making a large incision (cut). A thin, lighted tube—known as the laparoscope—is inserted into the abdomen through a small incision. The laparoscope allows your health care provider to see the pelvic organs. If a problem needs to be treated, other instruments are used. These instruments are inserted either through the laparoscope or through other small cuts in your abdomen.

### How long will I be in the hospital for laparoscopic surgery?

Laparoscopy often is done as outpatient surgery. You usually can go home the same day, after you have recovered from the anesthesia. More complex procedures, such as laparoscopic hysterectomy, may require an overnight stay in the hospital.

### What anesthesia is used for laparoscopic surgery?

Before surgery, you will be given **general anesthesia** that puts you to sleep and blocks the pain. **Regional anesthesia** instead of general anesthesia may be used. This type of anesthesia numbs the area, but you remain awake.

### How is laparoscopic surgery performed?

Your health care provider will make a small incision in your navel and insert the laparoscope. During the procedure, the abdomen is filled with a gas (carbon dioxide or nitrous oxide). Filling the abdomen with gas allows the pelvic reproductive organs to be seen more clearly.

The laparoscope shows the pelvic organs on a screen. Other incisions may be made in the abdomen for surgical instruments. These incisions usually are no more than one half an inch long. Another instrument, called a uterine manipulator, may be inserted through the cervix and into the uterus. This instrument is used to move the organs into view.

### What is involved in recovery?

If you had general anesthesia, you will wake up in the recovery room. You will feel sleepy for a few hours. You may have some nausea from the anesthesia. If you have had an outpatient procedure, you must have someone drive you home.

For a few days after the procedure, you may feel tired and have some discomfort. You may be sore around the incisions made in your abdomen and navel. Sometimes, the tube put in your throat to help you breathe during the surgery may give you a sore throat for a few days. If so, try throat lozenges or gargle with warm salt water. You may feel pain in your shoulder or back. This pain is from the gas used during the procedure. It goes away on its own within hours or a day or two. If pain and nausea do not go away after a few days or become worse, you should contact your health care provider.

Your health care provider will let you know when you can get back to your normal activities. For minor procedures, it is often 1–2 days after the surgery. For more complex procedures, it can take longer. You may be told to avoid heavy activity or exercise.

### What are the risks of laparoscopic surgery?

As with any surgery, there is a small risk of problems with laparoscopy. These risks include:

- Bleeding or hernia in the incision sites
- Internal bleeding
- Infection
- Injury to internal organs
- Problems caused by anesthesia

Sometimes the problems do not appear right away. The risk that a problem will occur is related to the type of surgery that is performed. The more complex the surgery, the greater the risk. Be sure to ask your health care provider about the risks associated with your specific surgery. There also may be other ways to treat your condition besides surgery, such as medications.

In some cases, the surgeon decides that a laparoscopy cannot be done during the surgery. An abdominal incision is made instead. If this happens, you may need to stay in the hospital for a day or two. Your recovery also will take longer.

### What are the benefits of laparoscopic surgery?

Laparoscopy has many benefits. There is less pain after laparoscopic surgery than with open abdominal surgery, which involves larger incisions, longer hospital stays, and a longer recovery. The risk of infection also is lower. You will be able to recover from laparoscopic surgery faster than from open abdominal surgery. It can be done as outpatient surgery, so you usually will not have to spend the night in the hospital. The smaller incisions that are used allow you to heal faster and have smaller scars.

### Glossary

**General Anesthesia:** The use of drugs that produce a sleep-like state to prevent pain during surgery.

**Regional Anesthesia:** The use of drugs to block sensation in certain areas of the body.

### If you have further questions, contact your obstetrician–gynecologist.

**FAQ061:** Designed as an aid to patients, this document sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. The information does not dictate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed and should not be construed as excluding other acceptable methods of practice. Variations, taking into account the needs of the individual patient, resources, and limitations unique to institution or type of practice, may be appropriate.

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