

Study: Recovery rates improve when pre-surgery procedures minimized

By Nancy Shute, NPR

Surgery can be a necessary misery, endured in hope of health.

But what if you took away the misery, and kept the benefits?

When hospitals quit subjecting patients to prolonged fasting, nasogastric tubes, abdominal drains, and other commonplaces of surgical care, a study finds, patients feel less pain and recover faster.

Women who had major abdominal surgery at the Mayo Clinic under a protocol to enhance recovery went home sooner and needed less pain medication than women who had the surgery the usual way. And 95 percent of the women in the group whose treatment emphasized recovery rated their care as excellent or very good.

The enhanced recovery approach, which was pioneered in Europe about a decade ago, abandons many of the standard steps for patient care before, during and after surgery. It turns out there was no evidence of benefit for many of these practices, even though they're used worldwide. So this protocol chucks them.

So patients aren't asked to slurp down quarts of medication to clean the gastrointestinal tract, so-called bowel prep, or told to shun food and drink before surgery. Instead, they can eat up till midnight the day before, and drink water up till four hours before surgery.

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