

Injured Athlete's Toolbox: How to Prepare for Surgery

Preparing your life and mind for surgery can be overwhelming, so do yourself a favor by breaking it down into small, purposeful steps. Throughout, keep in mind that your planning and attitude will either beget closer connections with family and friends or isolate you. To put odds in favor of the former, follow these steps.

Help yourself in advance

Especially for athletes, impending surgery generates a loss of control--over daily training routines, social networks, and emotions (you may begin to experience intense frustration, impatience and denial). Helping yourself places your focus on something you can control, and makes it easier for others to help you.

- 1) Make food you can freeze in advance of your surgery. Make it fun! Invite friends over for a cooking party. Try some new recipes. Keep in mind food that you'll eat even with a dodgy stomach and also post operative nutritional demands (<http://dougkelsey.com/how-much-protein-is-enough/>).
- 2) Make a list of chores that need to be done for as long as you're out of commission. Does your car need an oil change or inspection? Is your home air filter looking like a biohazard? Does your house need a deep cleaning? Get these done ahead of time.
- 3) Arrange for pet care and/or dog walking or training. If your dog is accustomed to your active lifestyle, she'll get bored while you recover. Don't let your house turn into what looks like a missile testing site. Hire a behaviorist or a good pet sitter to help alleviate your best friend's frustration.
- 4) Consider hiring a housekeeper.
- 5) If you won't be working, or will otherwise be out of your normal routine, you'll need some structure. Make a list of things you want to accomplish during your convalescence and set a daily schedule for yourself. Include time for physical therapy, journaling, stretching, and creative mental exercises.

Ask for help

Nearly everyone strives to be independent. It's hardwired. But if your best friend asked for help, what would you do? You'd help. And if they didn't ask for help when they needed it, you'd feel distant. Allow friends and family to help. Also remember that when someone offers you help and you decline, they are not likely to offer again. It's just human nature to not seek out a rejection. If you must decline, be extra gracious and suggest a rain check. When you accept help you strengthen bonds, which ultimately become even more gratifying when your friend someday asks for help in return. Life is long and everyone needs help sometimes.

- 1) Put a friend in charge of setting up an online help schedule for you at carecalendar.com or lotsahelpinghands.com. Be very specific with your requests in terms of dietary preferences and times you need to be at appointments.

2) On your care calendar include time slots for people to come over and hang out. Talk, watch a movie, or share dinner. Bring the party to you so you don't become a depressed shut-in.

3) Spread out your help requests among many friends. That way your family and closest friends are not too burdened.

4) Ask your friends to make a little extra the next time they cook dinner.

Remember this: *If you can't ask for help without self-judgment, you aren't able to offer help without self-judgment.*

~Martha Beck

Get the supplies you'll need

Creativity is your gateway to patience. **If you don't set aside time to exercise your creative mind you'll become insufferable and your support system will dwindle.** Apply the same diligence you used to train to exercising your creative mind.

1) Get yourself some stationery that you can transform into thank you notes. **Never let anyone's help and support go unappreciated without a handwritten note.** I'm talking old school stamp and mailbox. No email or texting allowed. Why? It's healing and therapeutic to focus on the love you're receiving.

2) Visit an art supply store. I know, the cheap novelty store smell of Michaels is vomitous. Locate a proper art store and treat yourself to some paint, brushes, markers, sketchbooks, or whatever your heart desires.

3) Purchase or make three journals. Use one to document your progress, one to voice your worries or anxieties, and one to capture what you appreciate. **Write in your journals every day, like religion.** Whether it's your first or eighth, facing surgery disrupts emotional homeostasis. It seems easier to wallow in a pool of denial and anger than to take charge of your reality by creating a positive surgery experience (I promise there is such a thing) for yourself and your support crew. The fact is you have all the drive and organization to realize the positive experience you deserve. How do I know? You're an athlete. Now stop feeling sorry for yourself and use your mental fortitude to get working on your surgery plan. It's the best gift you can give yourself in the midst of unpleasantness.

Want ideas for your recovery? Please visit my website, www.injuredathletestoolbox.com.

I wish you all the best with your upcoming surgery and recovery. Forward...

~Heidi Armstrong, Steadman Clinic patient and Injury Recovery Coach