



POP 2021

HOW PRE- AND POST-OPERATIVE PLANNING
CAN HELP AUSTRALIANS **HEAL BETTER.**



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FOREWORD

Dr. James Moir



Dr James Moir

*Obstetrician, Gynaecologist
and Infertility Specialist*

Slow or complicated recovery from abdominal surgery can have significant impacts on the individual. This includes the inability to return to work, loss of income, decreased mobility and function, challenges in caring for children or older relatives, and discomfort in undertaking normal day to day activities are other concerns.

The research in this report indicates the difficult experiences of Australians recovering from a range of abdominal surgeries and the disconnect between healthcare professionals and patients in what a holistic recovery plan entails.

The Heal Better kit, including the Belly Band support garment, offers a step forward in alleviating some of the problems in post- surgery recovery. I have had several women use the Belly Band in the last 18 months, who have had surgery with me in that time, and the feedback is very positive. They are very happy with the significant support the Band offers in the early phase following surgery.

By improving standards of care and providing guidance for patients, the Heal Better kit will contribute to faster and less painful recovery after abdominal or laparoscopic surgery and reduce the risk of further complications.

James Moir

FOREWORD

Mel Greig



Mel Greig

*Media personality and
endometriosis sufferer*

As an Endometriosis sufferer I understand the planning required for abdominal surgery, and it's not as simple as organising surgery over a weekend. I need to plan to take 2-4 weeks off work to have the surgery and recover.

For me, I'm normally sent home with a script of pain-killers and told to take them as needed. But that's not assisting in fixing the pain over the longer term, it's managing it temporarily. I've since learnt there are other strategies I can implement to manage the pain, such as using a belly band, decreasing the bloating by doing particular exercises and stretches to increase the blood flow, as well as a specific diet.

As the POP Report highlights, there is a disconnect between healthcare professionals and patients when discussing options for pre- and post-recovery from abdominal surgery. I believe that patients need to learn and self-educate on what is available to us to speed up the recovery time and to use each day of recovery effectively.

The POP Report is the spark that will start of this much-needed conversation with healthcare professionals. The time is now.

Mel Greig

WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA'S FIRST REPORT INTO PRE- AND POST-OPERATIVE PLANNING

PURPOSE

In 2017-2018, 1 in 4 hospitalisations in Australia involved surgery, with a large proportion focusing on the abdomen.¹ Surgery, particularly abdominal surgery, causes significant trauma to the body and recovery can range from intensive physical rehabilitation to a few days bed rest.

Australia's first-ever POP Report aims to highlight the real-life experiences of Australians recovering from abdominal surgery - from caesareans and hysterectomies, to appendectomies, hernias and endometriosis-related surgeries.

As outlined in the following report, medical specialists agree that complications in post-abdominal surgery and hospital re-admissions are often avoidable if patients are compliant with a structured post-operative recovery plan.

Whilst information is available for patients to educate themselves on post-abdominal surgery aftercare, there is not one reliable and accessible source that will guide a patient through the healing process using medically-backed solutions and evidence-based products.

Educating patients on all healing remedies can ease the often-difficult transition from hospital-to-home and minimise complications. These remedies include, but are not limited to, compression bandages, scar healing techniques, managing bloating and constipation, house preparation, exercise and diet.

A survey was conducted of 100 Australian healthcare professionals and 304 abdominal surgery patients*, documenting their views, experiences and perspectives on pre- and post-abdominal surgery planning and recovery.

The results indicated a significant disconnect and miscommunication between healthcare professionals and patients in what a holistic recovery plan entails post-abdominal surgery.

The aim of this report is to provide insight and evidence to identify practical solutions that can assist all Australians who have undergone abdominal surgery to heal fast and heal better.

ABOUT HEAL BETTER

This first-of-its-kind and much needed report was commissioned by Heal Better, the trusted brand specialising in worldwide innovation in post-operative aftercare education and healing. Australian made and owned, the Heal Better team is passionate about educating and empowering Australians about pre- and post-operative abdominal planning and recovery.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

*The survey was conducted by IRIS Research in November 2020. Participants included n=304 patients who had undergone abdominal surgery in Australia and n=100 Australian healthcare professionals specialising in General Surgery, Gynaecology and Obstetrics.



**RESULTS
SNAPSHOT:
POST-OPERATIVE
RECOVERY**



POST-OPERATIVE PLANS MATTER

95%

of healthcare professionals believe that **when patients are pre-informed** about common post-operative complications and preventative measures, **hospital re-admissions will decrease.**



HOWEVER, ONLY

70%

of those healthcare professionals **admit to providing a structured post-operative recovery plan** to abdominal surgery patients.



DELAYS IN RETURNING TO WORK

Recovery concerns are delaying Australians returning to work with **75% of patients sometimes and often having to extend their work or study leave** for longer than anticipated.

- **Sometimes**
63%
- **Often**
12%
- **Rarely**
12%
- **Never**
2%
- **Always**
1%



RECOVERY TIMES VARY

Younger patients found recovery to be a slower process compared with older patients (over 35).

Only **2 out of 5 people** were back to normal at the 6-week check-up.

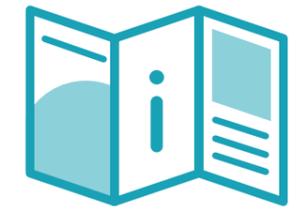
On average, patients take **25 days** leave from work/study to recover from abdominal surgeries.

INFORMATION PROVIDED TO ABDOMINAL SURGERY PATIENTS



80%

of patients said that the information was delivered verbally.



55%

of patients who were provided with information pamphlets.

VERSUS

ONLY 66% OF PATIENTS FELT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO THEM WAS ADEQUATE, HELPFUL AND ACCURATE.

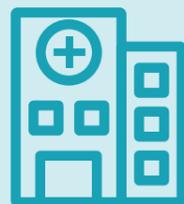
Although there is a slight difference, **both healthcare professionals and patients agreed that they were informed about pre- and post-operative recovery.**



Pre-operation preparation



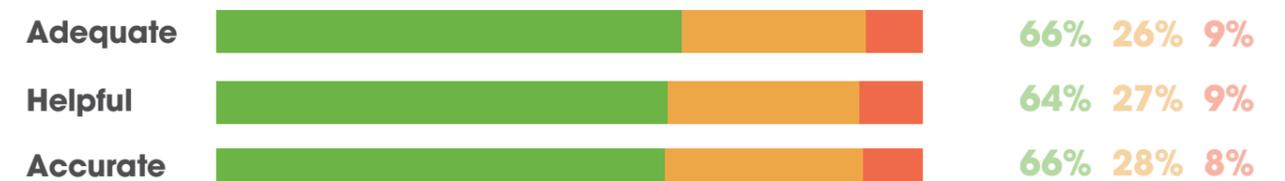
Post-operative complications and how to minimise risk



What to expect in hospital after surgery



Post-operation recovery at home



Incisional hernia prevention tactics



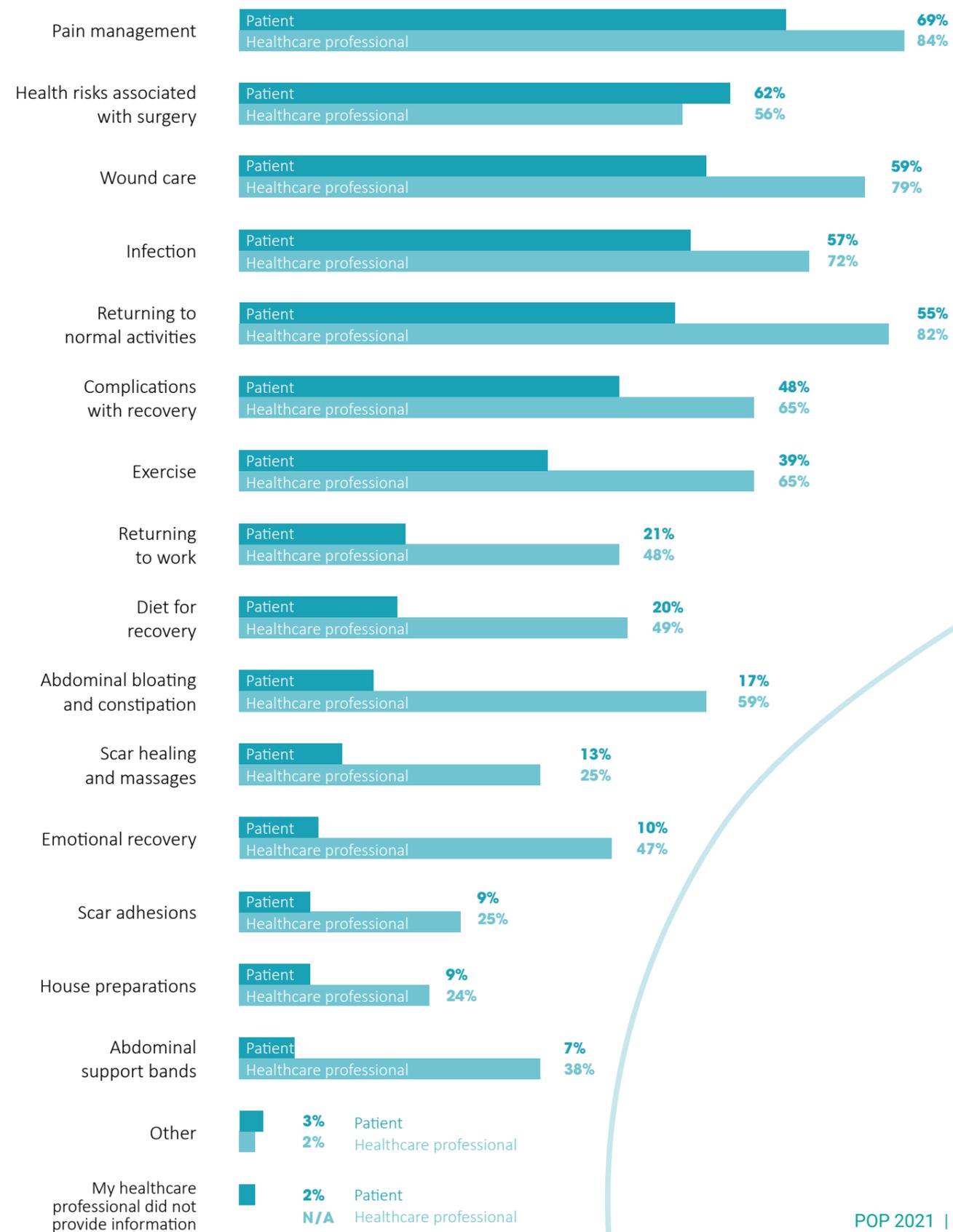
● Yes ● Somewhat ● No



PAIN MANAGEMENT IS THE MOST COMMONLY DISCUSSED REMEDY, WITH HOLISTIC THERAPIES RARELY DISCUSSED, ACCORDING TO PATIENTS.

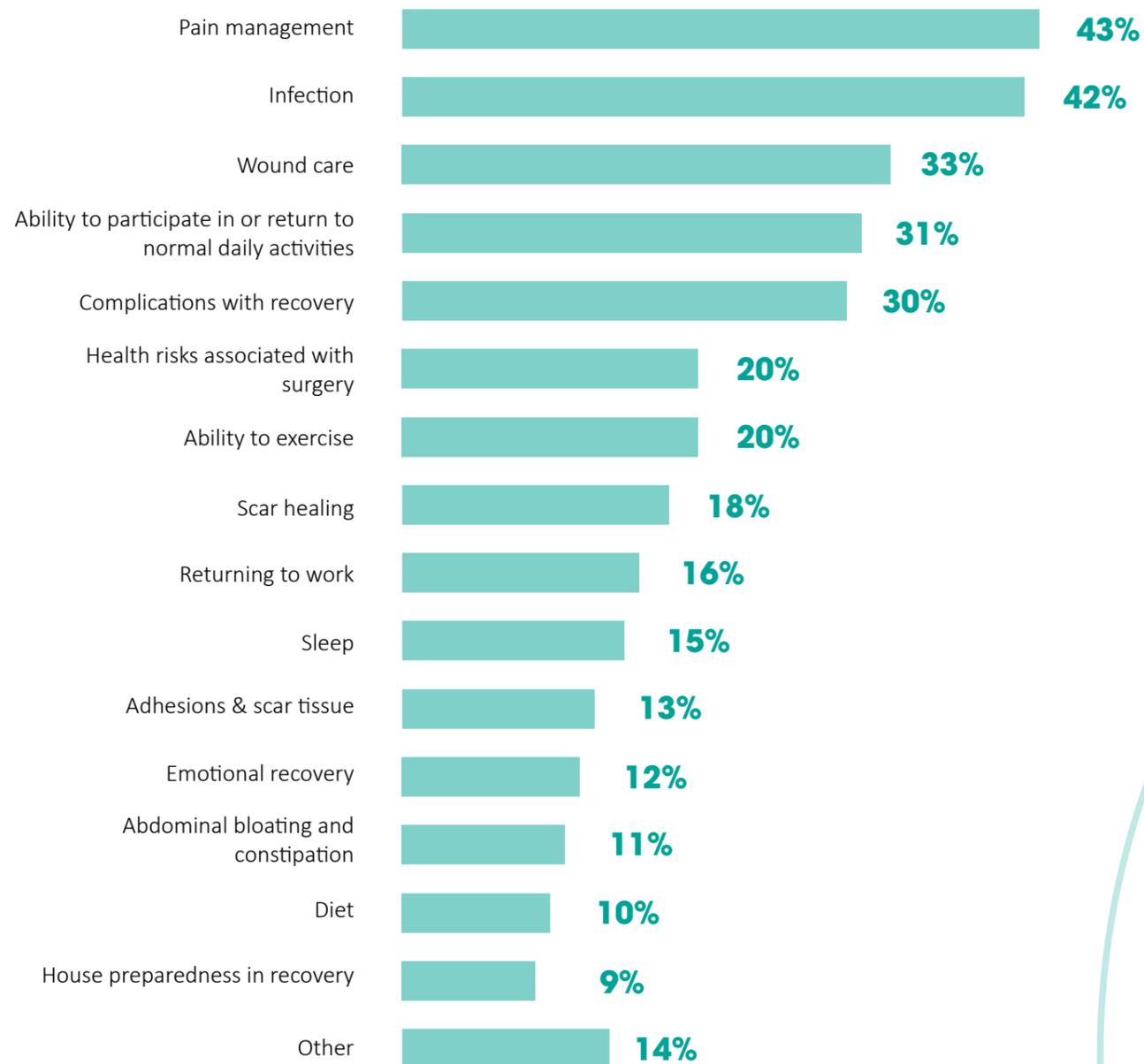
Pain management was the most discussed strategy in recovery with healthcare professionals less likely to speak about diet, scar care, house preparation and abdominal support bands – even though the use of an abdominal support band postoperatively significantly reduces pain and psychological stress, improves mobility and prevents abdominal wall tear.²

Just under **seven in ten patients recalled healthcare professionals providing information on pain management** followed by health risks and wound care. Less patients can recall being informed about recovery aspects, such as returning to work and diet. **Only 7% recall their healthcare professional informing them of abdominal support bands.**



POST-OPERATIVE RECOVERY CONCERNS

Almost all patients had **at least one concern about post-surgery recovery with pain management leading (43%)**, followed closely by **infection (43%)**, **wound care (33%)** and **the ability to participate or return to normal daily activities (31%)**.



Taking their healthcare professionals advice, a **majority of patients (64%) tried pain management as a method of recovery**; with other **holistic remedies** such as **abdominal support bands (13%)**, **hot and cold therapy pads (13%)** and **scar healing therapies (10%)**, not considered as commonly.



64%

PAIN MANAGEMENT



13%

ABDOMINAL SUPPORT BANDS

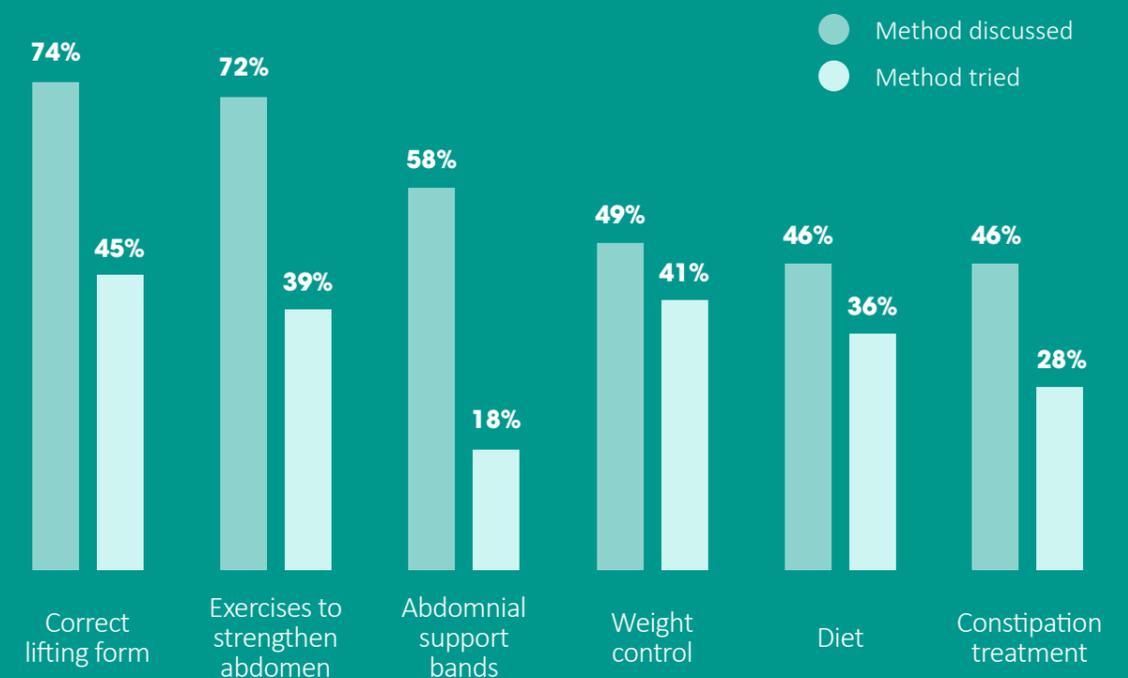


10%

SCAR HEALING THERAPIES

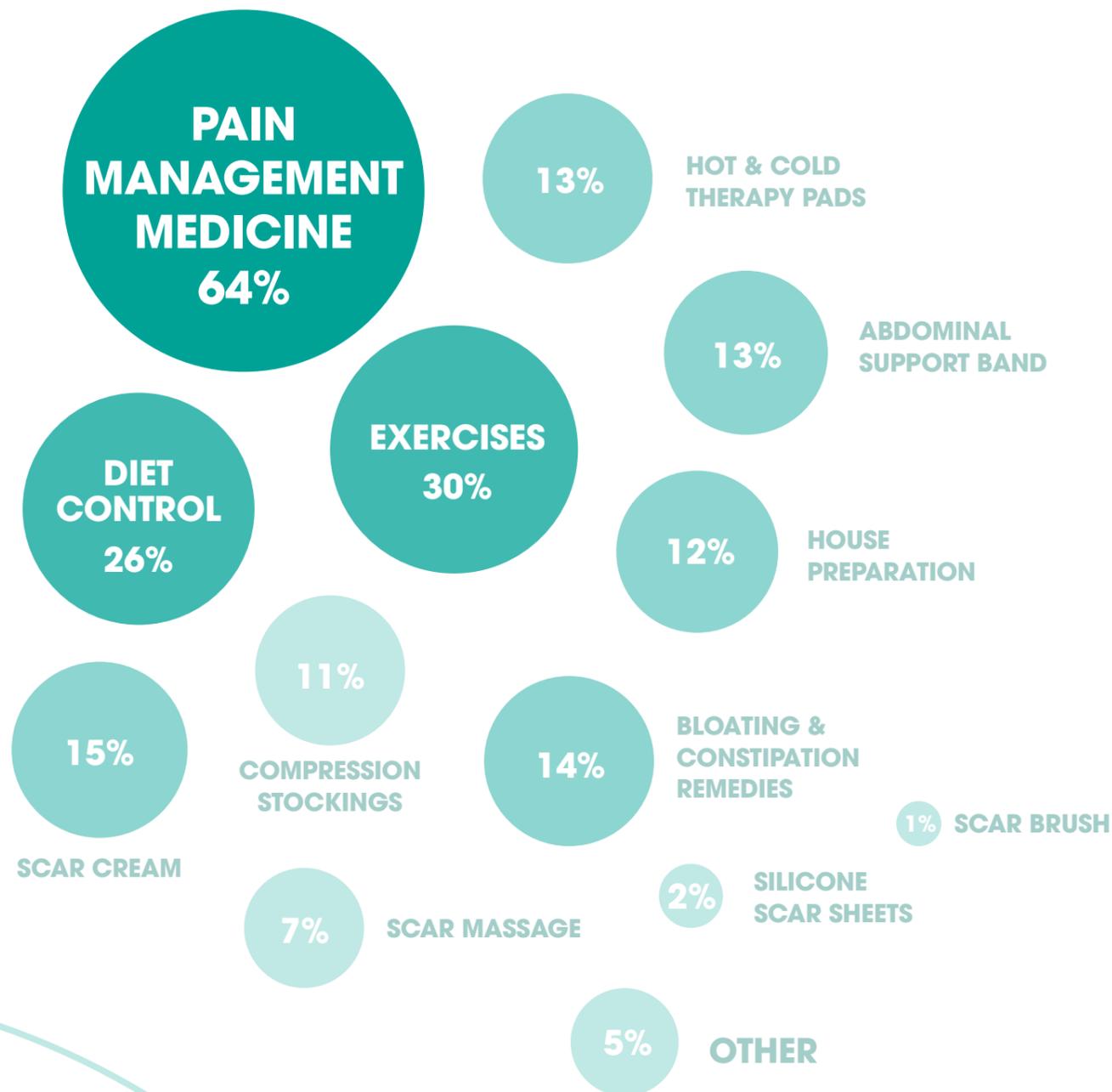
HERNIA PREVENTION ADVICE

Correct **lifting form and exercises to help strengthen the abdomen are the most recalled methods discussed for patients**. Correct lifting form is also the most tried method, followed by weight control. While **over half of patients (58%) that have received preventative hernia information have discussed abdominal support bands with healthcare professionals, only 18% have tried it**.



PATIENT RECOVERY METHODS

DATA BUBBLE



HIGHLIGHTING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO RECOVERY

Post-operative exercise should be **initiated as soon as possible after surgery**, according to enhanced recovery after surgery (ERAS) principles.³

Cold therapy pads **significantly diminish pain by reducing inflammation and swelling**, which lets more oxygen flow to cells easily.⁴

Silicone scar sheets are **internationally recommended as the first-line form of scar management**. The product aids recovery by blocking the scar site and hydration of the wound, suppressing the overactivity of scar-related cells and normalising reproduction.⁵ Despite this, only **13% of patients recall being told about scar healing by their healthcare professional**.

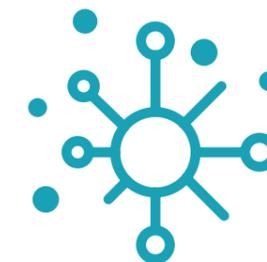
UNDERSTANDABLY, PAIN MANAGEMENT IS THE MOST COMMON POST-OPERATIVE ISSUE FOR PATIENTS.

Regardless of these insights, **healthcare professionals reported pain management as the most common post-operative issue (77%)**, followed by infection (57%) and wound care (54%).



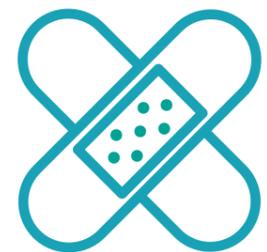
77%

PAIN MANAGEMENT



57%

INFECTION



54%

WOUND CARE



CASE STUDY

KATE WILSON
FERNY HILLS, QLD

A DEEPER LOOK INTO CAESAREAN PATIENTS

An average of **65% of patients felt they were provided with adequate, helpful and accurate information** on what to expect in hospital after surgery and when recovering at home.

Pain management was the most discussed strategy in recovery (75%) with healthcare professionals less likely to speak about scar adhesions (12%), diet for recovery (12%), emotional recovery (15%) and abdominal support bands (15%).

Pain management (49%) and infection (49%) were the biggest post-operative concern.

Patients are **more likely to try pain management methods (76%)** and **less likely to try scar healing remedies** such as scar brushes, massages and silicone sheets (10%) and abdominal support bands (15%).

“THE MIDWIVES ONLY SEEMED TO FOCUS ON NATURAL BIRTHS WITH LITTLE CONVERSATION ABOUT C-SECTION RECOVERY.”

Kate Wilson was in her first pregnancy during COVID-19 and postpartum care was not on her radar. Once she was told that a C-section was imminent, her physiotherapist mentioned that supportive compression shorts would help her in post-operative recovery.

“Living in Queensland, the thought of wearing shorts in the hot, humid weather was off-putting. But thankfully I found a band that could help support my recovery instead,” Kate says.

Although the birth was traumatising and her insides felt like a washing machine (Kate’s words!), she thankfully had the abdominal support that a compression bandage provides.

“I am not good at taking it easy and I’m really scared of doing damage,” she adds. “The midwives only seemed to focus on natural births with little conversation about c-section recovery, so I’m thankful my physiotherapist mentioned a natural alternative to healing.”

HYSTERECTOMY

An average of **78% of patients felt they were provided adequate, helpful and accurate information** on what to expect in hospital post-surgery and during recovery at home.

Pain management was the most discussed strategy in recovery (75%) with healthcare professionals less likely to speak about abdominal support bands (5%) and scar healing and massages (3%).

Infection (35%) and **'ability to participate in or return to normal daily activities' (35%)** were the biggest concerns post-operation.

Patients were **more likely to try pain management methods (60%)** and **less likely to try scar healing remedies** such as scar brushes, massages and silicone sheets (13%).

The majority of hysterectomy patients took time off work or study for **5 to 6 weeks (52%), followed by 3 to 4 weeks (23%)**.

ENDOMETRIOSIS-RELATED SURGERY

An average of **64% of patients felt they were provided adequate, helpful and accurate** information on what to expect in hospital post-surgery and when recovering at home.

Infection was the most discussed complication in recovery (76%) with healthcare professionals less likely to speak about scar healing (12%).

Infection (44%) and **pain management (41%)** were the biggest concerns post-operation.

Patients were **more likely to try pain management methods (61%)** and **less likely to try scar healing remedies** such as scar brushes, massages and silicone sheets (14%).

Most patients took **approximately 3 weeks** off work/study to recover.





CASE STUDY

ADAM KINKADE
EDGEWORTH, NSW

“I WAS NEVER TOLD AFTER MY INITIAL HERNIA SURGERY THAT I WOULD BE SUSCEPTIBLE TO ANOTHER ONE OR EVEN ANY PREVENTATIVE STRATEGIES – JUST PAIN RELIEF.”

HIGHLIGHTING THE INCONSISTENCIES WITH HERNIA PATIENTS

Concerningly, **only 32% of patients received information on hernia prevention**, whereas 60% of healthcare professionals said that they do provide this information.

Only **35% of metro patients** were provided information on hernia prevention tactics compared with a concerning **26% of regional patients**.

Correct lifting form (74%) and exercises (72%) to help strengthen the abdomen are the most recalled methods discussed with patients.

Correct lifting form is the most tried method (**45%**) followed by **weight control (41%)**.

An average of **66% of patients felt they were provided adequate, helpful and accurate information** on what to expect in hospital after surgery and when recovering at home.

Infection (38%) and **‘ability to participate in or return to normal daily activities’ (35%)** were the biggest concerns post-operation for hernia patients.

While over half of patients were informed about abdominal support bands (58%) **only 18% of patients used one**.

Adam Kinkade was in constant pain and was unsure of the source. He did have a history of kidney stones, so he thought this could be the issue.

After seeing various doctors with negative results from the stone diagnosis and continued pain, he questioned his General Practitioner if it could be a hernia. He did have a hernia 10 years earlier, although he’d been pain-free since the surgery to rectify it and he had no bulging from the site. Doctor after doctor denied that it was a hernia, but Adam was in serious pain: “It was an intense, sharp pain in my abdomen that ultimately became debilitating.”

Every time Adam moved, his abdomen would spasm. He became an unreliable worker and had to quit his job to become a stay-at-home dad.

Finally, a doctor believed him and sent him to a specialist to get an ultrasound.

Adam was diagnosed with a double-hernia vertical on his stomach.

“I was never told after my initial hernia surgery that I would be susceptible to another one or even any preventative strategies – just pain relief,” Adam adds.

Six weeks after his second hernia surgery, Adam had complications as his abdomen herniated. The severe pain continued. With no holistic approach to recovery, he was sent home simply with pain management. On one of his multiple visits to the emergency room, when the pain became unbearable, thankfully a doctor suggested wearing a hernia belt.

Adam currently wears his hernia belt on a daily basis which helps ease the pain.

He hopes to avoid another surgery for as long as possible and thankfully his hernia belt is helping him cope.

POP 2021

WHAT'S NEXT?

THE HEAL BETTER TEAM IS PASSIONATE ABOUT EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING AUSTRALIANS TO HEAL BETTER AFTER ABDOMINAL SURGERY AND COMMITTED TO RELEASING AUSTRALIA'S POP REPORT EACH YEAR.

After many customers expressed their difficult experiences when recovering from abdominal surgery, Heal Better identified a gap in the market. There was a strong need for an easy-to-use post-operative care mobile application and healing kit to alleviate the often-difficult transition from hospital-to-home for patients following abdominal surgery.

Developed in consultation with medical professionals, The Heal Better Kit and Heal Better App have been specifically designed for any abdominal procedure to empower patients to take charge of their recovery with confidence and heal well.

The Heal Better Kit contains a range of useful products to assist with all aspects of recovery and the Heal Better App is a unique, innovative and easy-to-use tool with engaging videos and interactive diagrams that are both educational and enjoyable to use for patients of all ages.

The Heal Better Kit is the first of its kind on the Australian market and is now attracting global attention.

The team at Heal Better hope they can help minimise complications, improve patient outcomes and make a positive difference to post-operative aftercare.

