

Postoperative Instructions

Daily care of wound:

- ❑ The bandage placed at the time of surgery should be kept dry and intact for 48 hours.
- ❑ Apply an ice pack wrapped in a towel (a bag of frozen vegetables can also be used) for 15 minutes of each hour during waking hours on the operative day. Please keep the bandage dry.
- ❑ After 48 hours, first wash your hands with soap and water. Then, remove the bandage and gently clean the wound with Q-tips that have been moistened with soap and water. Blot the wound dry with clean gauze or Q-tips. If you experience a great deal of crusting, you may use hydrogen peroxide to clean. This will bubble up and help loosen the crusted tissue. Switch back to soap and water after several days. Do not use hydrogen peroxide on a skin graft, as it may impair the ability of the graft to “take.”
- ❑ Once clean, apply a generous amount of petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) or Aquaphor® healing ointment to the wound with clean Q-tips. Cover the wound with a non-stick Telfa pad cut into the shape of the wound. Add gauze if there is drainage or oozing. Secure the dressing with tape. Do not let the wound dry out and “scab over.” It heals faster and better when it stays moist with ointment and a dressing.
- ❑ Continue wound care once daily until the wound is completely healed or until suture removal.

General Instructions:

- ❑ Go home and take it easy for at least 24 hours.
- ❑ You may shower at any time after surgery, as long as the bandage is kept dry in the first 48 hours. Avoid direct water pressure on the bandage or surgical site at all times.
- ❑ Sleep with head or surgery site elevated, using several pillows when possible.
- ❑ **Smokers:** To promote better healing, it is **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** that you make every attempt to quit smoking for two weeks after your surgery.

Closure Specific Instructions:

- ❑ **Second intention healing:** Open wounds (no stitches). The wound may take about 6-8 weeks or longer to heal over completely.
- ❑ **Suture closure:** In the weeks following suture removal, the suture line has only 5% of its original strength. In order to optimize your scar, facilitate healing and minimize the risk of bleeding, please refrain from the following for 2-3 weeks. You may gradually resume these activities over time.
 - Heavy lifting (greater than 10 lbs); stooping or bending down at the waist
 - Exercise and sports (i.e. golfing, running, swimming)
 - Yardwork or housework (i.e. laundry, vacuuming, loading/unloading the dishwasher)
 - Sleeping on the sutured area
- ❑ **Skin grafts:** The wound care instructions above explain the care of your donor site. You will be given an additional instruction sheet for the care of your skin graft. Please follow these instructions carefully.

Site Specific Instructions:

- ❑ **Ear:** After washing with soap and water as instructed, soak a paper towel in a mixture of equal parts white vinegar and tap water and apply to the wound for 10 minutes. Blot dry and apply ointment and dressing as instructed. This is done to reduce the chance of infection with a bacteria that can reside in the ear.
- ❑ **Nose surgery:** Try to avoid forceful nose-blowing. Use Q-tips if necessary.
- ❑ **Extremity surgery:** Elevate the area as much as possible above your waist when you are resting.
- ❑ **Forehead, cheek or eyelid surgery:** Be aware that significant eyelid swelling, bruising or a “black eye” can result and is expected in these areas.
- ❑ **Lip surgery:**
 - Please follow a soft food diet.
 - Avoid excessive talking and laughing.
 - Use Q-tips to brush teeth instead of a toothbrush.
 - Keep lips well-lubricated with petroleum jelly or Aquaphor.

OVER

What to Expect in the Postoperative Period

The importance of postoperative care for your surgical site cannot be overemphasized. Your role in caring for your surgical wound is extremely important to the success of wound-healing and your recovery. There are several things to be aware of following surgery:

- 1. Bleeding** or oozing at the surgical site is fairly common after surgery. To reduce the possibility of bleeding, please follow the post-op instructions carefully. *If bleeding saturates your dressing (some spotting of the dressing is expected), remove the bandage, move to a seated or lying position and apply firm continuous pressure with gauze pads for 20 minutes (timed). If there is still oozing, repeat pressure for another 20 minutes. This will usually stop most postoperative bleeding. If not, please call (413) 733-9600 and notify your physician or physician assistant.
- 2. Swelling, bruising, and numbness** are common after surgery. To help reduce these symptoms, follow the post-op instructions for keeping the area elevated and applying an ice pack. Numbness is usually temporary, but, in some cases, can persist for up to one year or more.
- 3. Pain** after surgery is generally mild. If you experience pain or discomfort, take Extra Strength Tylenol® or acetaminophen every 4-6 hours during waking hours. Do not exceed the maximum dose listed on the bottle. If pain remains uncontrolled, please call (413) 733-9600 and notify your physician. **DO NOT take aspirin or aspirin-containing pain relievers, ibuprofen, Advil®, Motrin®, Excedrin®, Naprosyn® or drink alcohol, as these products may cause bleeding.**
- 4. Drainage or discharge:** A bloody, yellowish or watery discharge is expected during the healing process. Infection seldom occurs when the wound care instructions have been carefully followed. Signs of infection include increased pain, swelling, redness, warmth, and excessive or foul-smelling drainage starting several days after surgery. Please contact our office if you experience signs of infection.
- 5. Scar:** Any treatment for skin cancer will leave a scar. As a rule of thumb, the line of stitches tends to be longer than the length of the original wound. This is done to avoid unnatural puckering and dimpling of the skin that would result if the incision were not lengthened. Both redness and bumpiness of the scar are expected, especially in the first two months. These generally improve as healing progresses, but redness can be expected for as long as 6-8 months. In general, a postsurgical scar improves with time and can take up to one year or more to fully mature. Everyone heals differently and the final scar appearance depends greatly upon an individual's ability to heal. If you have a history of abnormal scarring, such as hypertrophic scars or keloids, or if there are problems with the healing of your scar, injections or other treatments may be used to optimize the cosmetic result. These are generally not used until many months after the surgery in order to allow for your body's natural healing to occur. Your physician or physician assistant is available to you throughout the healing process to discuss any concerns that arise.