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Post Operative Instructions

These instructions are meant to help your skin heal properly and increase your comfort as you recover from skin surgery.

Daily wound care

Care varies, depending on how your wound was closed.

For wound where adhesive surgical strips ("Steri-strips") were used:

Do nothing. Typically any type of additional dressing is not required; if a bandage is applied then gently remove the morning after surgery. If there is fresh bleeding after 24 hours contact our office. Avoid getting the area wet; a small amount of water is ok. Do not soak the area. Avoid any soap/lotion application in the area as this will dissolve the adhesive that was used. The goal is to have the surgical strips stay attached for at least 14 days.

For wounds closed with stitches WITHOUT adhesive strips:

Gently remove your bandage the morning after surgery. Change the dressing once to twice a day (and whenever it becomes wet) following these guidelines:

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Gently clean the area of your wound with cotton-tipped swabs or gauze dipped in soapy water.
- As you clean the area, remove crusty material and any petroleum jelly (Vaseline™) applied at the end of your surgery.

Tip: If you cannot easily remove the crust, soak the area with tap-water moistened gauze for 15 to 20 minutes to soften the crust. Do not let thick crusts or scabs form. Your wound will heal faster if you keep it clean and moist.

- After removing crusty material, gently pat the area dry with clean gauze or cotton-tipped swabs.
- Use a clean cotton-tipped swab to apply a thin layer of petroleum jelly over the area.
- Cover the area with clean gauze or a nonstick dressing. Place additional clean gauze over the area if needed to absorb bleeding or oozing. Secure the gauze or dressing with tape or a bandage.
- Continue daily wound care until your stitches are removed, your wound heals, or your surgeon advises you to stop.

Your stitches should be removed in/on _____.

Activity

Unless you receive other instructions, follow these guidelines to help minimize swelling and promote proper healing:

- Do not lift anything weighing more than 10 pounds and avoid strenuous activities, such as bending, straining, vacuuming, jogging or aerobics, until three weeks after your surgery.

Why? There are two reasons why we restrict activity. First, physical stretching of the wound will cause the scar to spread thus worsening the appearance of the wound and prolonging the healing process. Second, increased activity temporarily increases your blood pressure. Higher blood pressure can lead to bleeding in fragile areas of healing skin.

- For many people, walking is an excellent non-strenuous activity during recovery. You may gradually walk for longer periods. However, within the first two weeks after your surgery, avoid walking so fast that your heart rate greatly increases or you are breathing hard or rapidly.

Why? Increased heart rate and activity will increase your blood pressure thus leading to an increased risk of bleeding in areas of healing skin.

- If your surgery was on your head or neck, try to keep your head higher than the rest of your body for the first two days after surgery. Elevate your head on two or three pillows when you lie down. Do not lower your head below waist level if you bend over to pick up objects or tie your shoes.

Why? Positioning the head/neck lower than the heart will cause the blood to pool in the head/neck. This will increase bleeding into the area of healing skin, which will delay the healing process and may lead to bleeding complications.

- If your wound was closed with surgical adhesive strips or stitches, do not swim or use a hot tub until after 14 days from your surgery.

Why? Swimming in fresh or salt water exposes the wound to high bacterial counts which may lead to infection. Also, prolonged soaks in water can weaken certain types of sutures.

Diet

Unless you receive other instructions, you may return to your normal diet as you feel able. However, if your surgery involved your lips or mouth, avoid hot liquids and foods for the first two to three hours after surgery, and eat soft foods for the first three days after surgery.

Alcohol and smoking

Do not drink alcoholic beverages for at least three days after your surgery. Do not smoke for at least two weeks after surgery.

Why? Alcohol increases the risk of bleeding complications by interfering with the clot-forming process required in healing skin. Smoking causes blood flow to decrease to the wound. This will lead to increased wound infection risks, slow wound healing and poor scar appearance.

If you are still using nicotine products, please let your care team know. Now would be a great time to try to quit the use of cigarettes. There are excellent resources which can help you achieve this goal.

Bathing

Unless you receive other instructions, follow these guidelines:

- Keep the area of your surgery dry until the morning after surgery.
- The morning after surgery, remove your bandage or other dressing and shower or bathe briefly. You may use your normal soap and shampoo — these products will not harm your wound. If you have surgical adhesive strips avoid any application of soap/shampoo/body wash to the area.

Afterward, gently pat your wound dry, then apply a bandage or dressing as instructed (see “Daily wound care” page 1).

Do not submerge the operative site under water in a pool, bathtub, or jacuzzi for 7 days or until sutures are removed.

Pain and discomfort

- Continue to take aspirin or warfarin (Coumadin™) if you take it for either of the following situations:
 - A medical condition (for example, a history of stroke or heart attack, transient ischemic attack [TIA or pre-stroke], heart disease, angina or a blood clot)
 - After certain medical procedures (for example, bypass surgery or angioplasty)

Some discomfort is normal after skin surgery, but the amount and duration of pain varies. Unless you receive other instructions, follow these guidelines to relieve discomfort:

Within the first 24 hours:

- You may take non-aspirin pain relievers containing acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Aspirin Free Anacin™) in the recommended dose as needed for discomfort. Do not take more than the recommended dose.

After the first 24 hours:

- You may take pain medication containing aspirin (Ascriptin™, Anacin™, Excedrin™), ibuprofen (Motrin™, Advil™) or naproxen sodium (Aleve™, Naprosyn™).

Why? These products thin the blood and may increase bleeding after surgery. To avoid these products, read the labels of all over-the-counter medications. If you are unsure about the ingredients in a medication, ask the pharmacist or your health care provider.

Bleeding

Some minor oozing of blood from the surgical site is normal for a few days after surgery. If your wound bleeds enough that blood soaks through to the outside of your bandage, follow these guidelines:

- Place clean gauze or washcloth on top of the bloody bandage. Do not remove the bandage.
- Apply firm, continuous pressure on the gauze, directly over the wound, for 20 minutes. If bleeding continues, apply pressure for another 20 minutes. Firm pressure should be slightly painful. Do not peek at the wound.
- If the bleeding stops, wait a couple of hours, then gently replace the old bandage with a clean dressing.
- If the bleeding continues despite 40 minutes of continuous, firm pressure, call our office for further instructions. If you are close enough, you may be asked to return for re-evaluation.

Swelling and bruising

Swelling and bruising are normal after surgery, and may increase for two to three days. If the surgical wound is on the face/scalp, particularly the eyelids, swelling, bruising, and/or throbbing may occur which can be minimized by sleeping with head elevated. Bruising and swelling usually begin to lessen a few days after surgery. To help reduce swelling:

- Hold an ice pack wrapped in a towel over the area for 10-15 minutes several times a day. This is optional.
- If swelling does not improve within a few days, or if the area becomes increasingly tender, immediately contact our office.

Symptoms of infection

Contact our office immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms of infection:

- Increasing pain, soreness, tenderness, redness or warmth around your wound after the second day following surgery; worsening pain is frequently the first sign of infection.
- A temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) or greater.
- Chills
- Drainage from your wound that is white, yellow-green or foul smelling (however, a firm, gray-white coating over a wound may be normal)

Please call our office if you do not receive notification of biopsy results within 7-10 days.