

AFTER SURGERY CARE INSTRUCTIONS

William S. Farmer, MD

Night of Surgery

- **Rest and Relaxation:** After surgery, rest is crucial. Relax both mentally and physically to keep blood pressure and bleeding under control. Avoid analyzing the results or researching online—trust the process and allow your body to heal.
- **Movement:** To prevent blood clots, periodically move your legs and ankles while resting, and take slow, gentle walks around the room with assistance.
- **Cold Compresses:** Apply a cold compress (e.g., frozen peas, ice pack) to the surgical site for 20 minutes on and 20 minutes off during waking hours, as much as tolerated. Wrap it in a towel or cloth to prevent frostbite. This is most effective during the first three days to reduce swelling.
- **Sleep:** If possible slightly elevate the surgical site above heart level while sleeping to reduce swelling. Continue this for one to two weeks as needed.
- **Hydration:** Drink plenty of water daily to support the healing process.
- **Bathing:** Keep the bandage away from water until it is time to be removed in 48 hours; however, you may get the rest of you wet.

Wound Care

- **Bandage Removal:** **Do not remove your bandage until 2:00 PM, 48 hours after surgery.** If the bandage accidentally comes off before then, rebandage the wound. To minimize discomfort, soak the bandage with lukewarm water for 15 minutes to loosen the adhesive before removing it. You may get the wound wet from here on out. The wound may appear swollen, discolored, or dirty; this is normal and not indicative of the final result.
- **Daily Wound Care:** Wash your hands thoroughly before handling the wound. Gently cleanse the wound with lukewarm water for 5 minutes. Do not scrub or rub the site. Apply a thick layer of the prescribed antibiotic ointment or, if unavailable, clean petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline, Aquaphor) from a new tube. Do not use over-the-counter antibiotic ointments such as Neosporin, as they may delay healing.

Do not let the wound dry out. Do not let the wound air out. Do not let a scab form.

Keep the wound covered with a simple bandage & ointment, changing it daily.

- **Sutures:** Your sutures are dissolvable and do not require removal. This is for your convenience; however, if you would like to have your wound checked for any reason, we are happy to do so. If the sutures have not dissolved after your recovery time (based on surgical location, see below) and the wound appears to be healed over, it is okay to gently brush the remaining sutures off.
- **Color:** Wounds, especially grafts and flaps, may go through a wide variety of skin color changes including a deep red, black, and yellow. This is normal and does not indicate the graft or flap was unsuccessful. Please avoid allowing the wound to dry out by keeping Vaseline or antibiotic ointment on it, as this will kill the graft or flap.

Medication Management

- **Antibiotics** Take your prescribed antibiotics as directed and complete the entire course. Take with a full glass of water and food.
- **Pain Management:** Expect some discomfort and pain, especially during the first 48-72 hours. Take pain medication regularly during this period, rather than waiting for the pain to intensify.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) 1000 mg, four times a day, is recommended for the first 48 hours.

Adding NSAIDs (Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Aspirin) for pain will increase bleeding risk.

If you have liver issues or are a heavy drinker, the maximum dose of acetaminophen should be reduced to 2000 mg daily. Take all NSAIDs that are recommended by your other medical providers as usual but avoid adding any for pain. If you experience significant pain or if pain worsens after 72 hours, please contact our office as this may indicate an infection or other complication.

Physical Activity and Lifestyle Adjustments

Recovery Times By Surgical Location

7 days for face, neck, genitals

14 days for trunk, arms, hands, scalp, buttocks

21 days for legs, feet

- **Activity Restrictions:** **Avoid bending, straining, lifting more than 10 pounds, intercourse, or any activity that raises your heart rate during the recovery period.** Light household activities may be resumed after a few days, but be cautious with movements that could strain the surgical area.
- **Returning to Work:** Most patients require 5-7 days off work, depending on the physical demands of their job. Physically intensive work may require light duty for the duration of the recovery period.
- **Exercise:** You may resume exercise after your recovery period. Start gradually and be aware that swelling may temporarily worsen with physical activity.
- **Tobacco & Alcohol:** Avoid tobacco products since they delay healing, increase scarring, and lead to death of skin grafts or flaps. Nicotine should also be avoided; however, if you have uncontrollable cravings, nicotine in the form of non-tobacco nicotine products such as vaping or patches is preferred over tobacco. Because alcohol thins the blood, avoid alcohol. Patients dependent on alcohol should attempt limiting their alcohol intake as best as they can.
- **Travel:** Automobile travel can resume immediately. Air travel should be avoided for at least one week and preferably for up to two months for optimal cosmesis, due to the risk of increased swelling from pressure changes. Do not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medications.

Long-Term Care and Scar Management

- **Silicone Gel or Tape:** Use silicone gel or tape once the wound has healed to minimize scarring. Continue using sunscreen and petroleum jelly to protect the area and promote healing. Surgical scars can have a bad appearance the first 3 months as the scar remodels; scars continue to remodel for about a year.
- **Altered sensation:** Occasionally, you may experience itching, numbness, or tingling, if the small nerves in your skin went through the area that was cut out. These nerves grow back very slowly; it may take several months to a couple of years.