Home Care after Craniotomy Surgery

This handout provides guidelines for your care at home after surgery. You will be given more written instructions at the time you are ready to leave the hospital. Please follow those instructions carefully. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your doctor or nurse.

Incision Care

- Your stitches or staples will be removed 10 to 14 days after surgery. Refer to your discharge instructions for more information.

- A small amount of fluid may collect under the skin near the incision. This is common and most often reabsorbs over time. The swelling may be worse in the morning and can change during the day. **Call the office if the swelling lasts longer than 2 weeks after surgery or if you have an increase in swelling or you notice any drainage from the incision.**

- You may limit the swelling by:
  - Sleeping with your head raised on several pillows
  - Staying active and out of bed during the day

- Your doctor or nurse will tell you how soon you may shower or bathe. You may be told to wear a shower cap to keep your incision dry while you have the staples or stitches in place.

- Once the staples or stitches are removed, gently wash around your incision and rinse thoroughly with water. Pat the incision dry.
• Avoid soaking, scrubbing or rubbing your incision for about 3 weeks after surgery.
• Do not apply any creams, lotions or powders to the incision.
• You do not need a bandage or dressing over the incision. Leave it open to air. You may wear a light hat or scarf.
• Check your incision every day for redness or drainage. It is normal for you to have some bruising, tenderness and some swelling around your incision line.
• Itching or burning is common during healing.
• Avoid permanent coloring or bleaching of hair for 3 to 4 weeks.

Activity
• Walk as much as you can.
• Use the railing for support when going up and down stairs.
• Avoid lifting more than 20 pounds for 6 to 8 weeks. Then slowly increase the weight as you are able.
• Limit bending at your waist. Bend your knees instead to limit pressure to your head.
• Avoid holding your breath to limit pressure build up in your head.
• It is normal for your energy level and sleep patterns to change after surgery. These things will slowly return to normal as you start your usual activities. Get extra sleep at night and take naps during the day to help you feel less tired. Take rest periods during the day. Complete recovery may take several weeks. Remember, everyone's recovery is different so don't be discouraged.
• Do not operate any power tools or heavy machinery if you are taking prescription pain medicine.
• Most people will return to work and be able to drive after 6 to 12 weeks, but check with your doctor when it is safe for you to do these activities.
• Sexual activity is okay, but it should not be too intense.
Medicines
You will be given instructions on how to take your medicines before you leave the hospital. Please follow them carefully. If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse or ask to speak to a pharmacist.

Pain Control
Mild headaches are common. If you are not getting relief with pain medicine, call the office.

Diet
You may resume your usual diet unless you are instructed to follow a special diet while in the hospital.

Bowel Movement
Some pain medicine can cause constipation. Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day and increase the amount of fruit and fiber in your diet. Being active and walking can be helpful too. If you need a laxative, use products like Ex-Lax, Milk of Magnesia, Colace or Correctol. Follow package directions for use. Ask a pharmacist to help you if you are not sure which product to use.

When to Call the Doctor
Call your doctor if you have any of these problems:

- Unusual drainage from your incision
- Skin around stitches becomes red, warm, swollen or tender
- Fever with a temperature greater than 101 degrees F
- Incision separates or opens up
- Pain, especially headache pain, increases or is not relieved with medicine
- Change in alertness or feeling more sleepy than usual
• Nausea and vomiting that keeps you from eating or drinking
• New onset of weakness in arms or legs
• New or worse problems speaking
• New or worse problems with balance or walking
• Seizures
• Feeling fluid drip from your nose into your throat, like post-nasal drip
• If you have questions or concerns about your recovery at home

Follow-up
Your doctor will decide when you should follow up after surgery. A follow up appointment will be included in your discharge papers. If this is not a convenient day or time, please call your neurosurgeon's office between 8 AM and 5 PM to reschedule.

If you have questions, call your neurosurgeon's office. You can also call:
• The general neurosurgery phone number at (614) 293-8714. Ask to speak to a nurse.
• The hospital operator at (614) 293-8000 and ask to have the doctor on call for neurosurgery paged.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.