Home Care after Craniotomy Surgery

This handout gives you information for your care at home after surgery. You will be given more instructions when you are ready to leave the hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your doctor or nurse.

Incision care

- The stitches or staples will be removed 10 to 14 days after surgery. Your discharge instructions will give you more information on how to care for the incision area.
- A small amount of fluid may collect under the skin near your incision. This is common and most often goes away over time. The swelling may be worse in the morning and can change during the day.
  - Call your doctor 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 try the following to help reduce the swelling:
  - Sleep with your head raised on extra pillows for about 2 weeks after surgery.
  - Stay active and out of bed during the day.
- Starting 5 days after surgery, shower and gently wash your hair and head, including the incision, with baby shampoo. Pat the incision dry with a towel. Do not cover the incision with hats or wigs. If you go outside in the cold, you may cover with a hooded sweatshirt or light scarf.
- Do not scrub, rub, or soak the incision area for 3 weeks after your surgery.
- Do not apply creams, lotions or powders on the incision area.
- Do not cover the incision area with a bandage or dressing. Leave it open to the air.
- Avoid sun exposure to the area if possible. Wear a light hat or scarf to protect your incision area from sun exposure.
- Check the incision every day for redness or drainage. It is normal to have some bruising, tenderness and swelling around the incision line.
- Itching or burning is common during healing. Do not scratch or pick at the incision as it heals.
- Do not apply permanent coloring or bleaching products to your head or hair for 3 months after surgery.

Activity

- If you have problems doing certain physical activities, your doctor may order a therapy evaluation. Depending on your needs, therapists can work with you to improve speech, balance, strength and daily living skills.
- Gradually return to your normal activities. Walking is a good activity to help you recover. Start with short walks and slowly increase the distance.
• Use the railing for support when you go up and down stairs.
• Do not lift, push or pull more than 5 pounds (about a 1/2 gallon of milk) for 6 weeks after surgery. Slowly increase the weight as you are able.
• Limit bending at your waist. Bend your knees to pick something up, this helps to lower the pressure to your head.
• Do not hold your breath. Holding your breath may cause pressure build up in your head.
• It is normal for your energy level and sleep patterns to change after surgery. These should slowly return to normal as you start your usual activities. Get extra sleep at night and take naps during the day. Take rest periods during the day. Complete recovery may take several weeks.
• Do not operate power tools or heavy machinery if you are taking prescription pain medicine.
• Most people will return to work and can drive about 6 weeks after surgery. Check with your doctor to see when it is safe for you to do these activities.
• Talk to your doctor about when it is okay for you to return to sexual activity after surgery.

**Medicines**

• You will get instructions on how to take your medicines before you leave the hospital. If you have any questions, ask your doctor, nurse or ask to speak to a pharmacist.
• **Do not** take aspirin or ibuprofen (or similar medicines) until your doctor says it is okay.

**Pain control**

• Mild headaches are common after this surgery. The neurosurgery team will give you a prescription for pain medicine for the first week or two weeks after your surgery. Tylenol should be used as the main treatment for pain.
• Extreme headache pain is unusual and must be evaluated by a doctor.

**Diet**

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

**Constipation and bowel movements**

• Some pain medicines can cause constipation. Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluids each day
• Increase the amount of fruit and fiber in your diet. Being active and walking can also be helpful.
• If you need a laxative, use products like Ex-Lax, Milk of Magnesia, Colace, Senna or Correctol. Follow the package directions. Ask a pharmacist to help you if you are not sure what product to use.
When to call the doctor
Call your doctor right away if you have any of these problems:
- Nausea and vomiting that keeps you from eating or drinking
- New weakness or swelling in your arms or legs
- Feel fluid drip from your nose or ears
- Change in the amount, color or odor of the drainage from the incision
- Skin around the incision becomes red, warm, swollen or tender
- Fever greater than 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius
- Incision pulls apart or opens up
- Headache pain or other pain that increases or is not relieved with medicine

When to go to the Emergency Department
Go to the nearest emergency department or call 911 right away for any of the following:
- Any change in alertness; feel more sleepy than usual or feel restless or confused
- Breathing problems
- Chest pain
- Vision problems or a change in vision
- New problems with weakness, numbness, or inability to move an arm or leg, balance or walking. Problems may be only on one side of the body.
- Change in face appearance, such as drooping on one side of the face
- Not able to speak or problems when talking, or trouble swallowing
- Seizures
- Nausea and vomiting that continues or gets worse
- Severe headache or headache with stiff neck

Follow-up with your doctor
Your doctor will decide when you should follow up after surgery. An appointment will be included in your discharge instructions. If you need to reschedule your appointment, call your neurosurgeon’s office between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM to reschedule.
If you have questions, call your neurosurgeon’s office at 614-293-4448.
You may also call the following with questions:
- 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.