

Camino Ear, Nose & Throat Clinic

Head & Neck Surgery Discharge Instructions

Today you had an open surgery on a part of your neck. There are some common issues that all people have after these surgeries:

1. The area around the incision will be tender and swollen. The swelling takes about 10-14 days to settle down. If the pain is not helped after taking two doses of your pain medication, please call and ask for advice.
2. The skin around the surgery site will be numb. This is normal and will resolve with time. It takes 4-6 weeks for all the feeling to return. Before it returns, you may feel tingling and sharp sensations as the nerves turn back on.
3. It is normal for the area over the incision and about 1 cm on each side to be red. Anything more than that may be a sign of skin infection. Please call if you notice this.
4. Your stitches will dissolve. Different sutures are used in your surgery. Some dissolve quickly, while the deeper ones take 4-6 weeks. The incision will be bumpy until all the stitches dissolve.

Dressing and wound covering:

1. If there is a clear bandage on top of your incision, this should be removed the day after surgery. It will peel off with gentle pressure. Do not use water.
2. The incision will have a layer of white bandages that look like tape. These are called steri-strips. They are glued on and will come off on their own. After they come off, do not cover the incision. Leave it open to the air.
3. You may wash the area with soap and water starting three days after surgery.
4. Do not put anything else on the incision until you are seen for your post-operative appointment.

Activity:

1. After surgery, even small surgery, you will be tired for several days. Please rest, but **DO NOT** stay in bed all day. It is important to keep moving and recommended that you walk at least 2-3 times a day for a minimum of 10-15 minutes. This is to prevent blood clots from forming in your legs as a result of lying down too long.
2. Keep the surgery area elevated. You should sleep with your head elevated at least 30 degrees for 10 days.
3. Do not lift anything heavier than 15 pounds for 10 days.
4. After the first week, increase your activity **SLOWLY**. If something starts to hurt, slow down, stop, and rest.
5. It is always okay to place ice on the area. Do **NOT** place ice directly on the skin. Wrap it in a t-shirt, towel or thin fabric.
6. Do not participate in contact sports for two weeks.
7. **NO** aerobic activity for two weeks; anything that raises your blood pressure will cause more swelling.

The healing process:

1. It is **NORMAL** to feel worse 3-4 days after surgery. The swelling from neck surgery will increase for the first 48 hours, and is worst for most people at about day three, after which you'll notice gradual improvement.
2. The muscles around the surgery will be swollen. They will start out tender. After a few days, they will all begin to stiffen. Gentle stretching through the day will help.
3. When washing the incision, do not scrub hard. You may notice pieces of your stitches sticking out, but do **NOT** touch or cut them.
4. As the skin heals, it will flatten out. Do not worry if it is raised and bumpy.
5. If you wish, you may start to use skin scar creams such as Miderma® two weeks after surgery. If you notice more redness, stop them immediately.
6. Your skin in the surgery area will be **MORE** sensitive to sunburn for six months or more. You should apply a sunscreen of at least SPF 25 to the skin every day, even on a cloudy day. Start in week two.

Why were the following medications given or not given:

- **Antibiotics:** you were given all the antibiotics you need during your surgery. Unless you have an infection before surgery, **NO** antibiotics are given after surgery. If you need them, special instructions will be given.
- **Steroids:** Certain parts of the neck will swell a lot after surgery. If you are given steroids, they are important for you to take and will help with swelling and pain. Your first dose was given during surgery. Start your home dose the day after surgery.
- **Nausea medication:** It is common to have an upset stomach after surgery. The medication we use is a rapid dissolve tablet that you place under your tongue. It can be used every eight hours if you are nauseous.
- **Heartburn medication:** Many of the medications given during and after surgery will upset your stomach and cause heartburn. If you are prescribed a heartburn medication, please take them even if you do not have heartburn or reflux.
- **Pain medication:** It is always best to stay ahead, but do not take more than prescribed unless you have asked your surgeon. Never share your pain medication. Almost all pain medications cause constipation. so plan ahead and use prune juice, stool softeners and fiber. All pain medications can upset your stomach so take them with food.
DO NOT MIX THEM WITH ALCOHOL.

Home Medications & Questions:

- **DO NOT** take and Aspirin or Aspirin-containing medications for 10 days after surgery.
- **DO NOT** take any medications with ibuprofen, Motrin®, Advil®, Toradol®, Naproxen or Aleve® for 10 days after surgery.
- If you take a blood thinner such as Plavix®, Pradaxa®, Coumadin or Warfarin, you may resume this medication in _____ days.
- If you are given a prescription for antibiotics, and you take a cholesterol medication, you should stop your cholesterol medication until the antibiotics are finished.
- If you have been prescribed any antibiotics or steroids, start these the day **AFTER** surgery. You received today's doses while you were asleep in surgery.
- Your nurse will tell you when it is safe to take your next dose of pain medications.
- If you have other questions, please call. Remember, your surgeon may **NOT** be the surgeon on call on a given night. If you have non-urgent questions, you will get a faster and better answer if you call the clinic during daytime hours, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.