

**Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery Group of Northern Virginia**  
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## **Postoperative Instructions**

### **Items Needed for Wound Care:**

- ❑ **Vaseline petroleum jelly** (a new jar is preferable as this will be applied directly to your healing wound-- generic is OK)
- ❑ **Non-stick dressing pads** (If your wound is small, a large bandaid can also be used as long as the entire wound is covered with the white nonstick pad and adhesive is not sticking to your surgery site or sutures.)
- ❑ **Sterile gauze pads**
- ❑ **Roll of medical tape, paper tape or silk tape**
- ❑ **Cotton balls or Q-tips**
- ❑ Optional: hydrogen peroxide

### **Daily care of wound:**

- ❑ The bandage placed at the time of surgery acts as a pressure dressing to prevent bleeding. It should be kept dry and intact for 48 hours. If it becomes wet or soiled prior to this, you may change the bandage earlier.
- ❑ If you experience swelling or bruising, you may apply an ice pack (a bag of frozen vegetables can also be used) to the area around your surgery site. Please keep the bandage dry.
- ❑ After 48 hours, first wash your hands with soap and water. Then remove the bandage and gently clean the wound with cotton balls or Q-tips that have been moistened with soap and water. Blot the wound dry with clean gauze or cotton balls. If you experience a great deal of crusting, you may use hydrogen peroxide to clean. This will bubble up and help loosen the crusted tissue. Switch back to soap and water after 1 to 2 days.
- ❑ Once clean, apply a generous amount of petroleum jelly (Vaseline) or Aquaphor healing ointment to the wound with clean Q-tips. Cover the wound with a non-stick dressing pad or bandage cut to a size that covers the wound. Add gauze if there is drainage or oozing. Secure the dressing with tape. Do not let the wound dry out and "scab over." It heals faster and better when it stays moist with ointment and a dressing.
- ❑ Continue wound care once daily (or as instructed) until the wound is completely healed or until suture removal.

### **General Instructions:**

- ❑ Go home and take it easy for at least 24 hours.
- ❑ You may bathe or shower at any time after surgery, as long as the bandage is kept dry in the first 48 hours. Avoid direct water pressure on the bandage or surgical site at all times.
- ❑ Sleep with head or surgery site elevated using several pillows when possible.
- ❑ **Smokers:** To promote better healing, it is **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** that you make every attempt to quit smoking for two weeks after your surgery.

### **Closure Specific Instructions:**

- ❑ **Second intention healing:** The wound may take about 6-12 weeks or longer to heal over completely. You have no activity restrictions; however, strenuous activity in the first 48 hours may increase the risk for bleeding.
- ❑ **Suture closure:** In the weeks following suture removal, the suture line has only 5-7% of its original strength. In order to optimize your scar, and minimize the risk of bleeding, please refrain from the following activities below for at least 2-3 weeks. When gradually resuming activities, please stop what you are doing if you feel tension or pulling at the surgery site. This may stretch the scar and lead to a worsened scar appearance.
  - Heavy lifting (greater than 10 lbs); stooping or bending over at the waist
  - Exercise and sports (i.e. golfing, running, swimming)
  - Strenuous yardwork or housework (i.e. laundry, vacuuming, loading/unloading dishwasher)
  - Sleeping on the sutured area
- ❑ **Skin grafts:** The wound care instructions above explain the care of your donor site. You will be given an additional instruction sheet for the care of your skin graft. Please follow these instructions carefully.

## **Site Specific Instructions:**

- ❑ **Ear:** After washing with soap and water as instructed, soak a paper towel in a mixture of equal parts white vinegar and tap water and apply to the wound for 10 minutes. Blot dry and apply ointment and dressing as instructed. This is done to reduce the chance of infection with a bacteria that can reside in the ear.
- ❑ **Nose surgery:** Try to avoid forceful nose-blowing. Use Q-tips if necessary. If you have to sneeze, apply firm pressure to your bandage to support the sutured area.
- ❑ **Extremity surgery:** Elevate the area as much as possible above your waist when you are resting.
- ❑ **Forehead, cheek or eyelid surgery:** Be aware that significant eyelid swelling, bruising, or a “black eye” can result, and is expected in these areas.
- ❑ **Lip surgery:**
  - Please follow a soft food diet or cut your food into small pieces. Try to avoid large bites of food such as with an apple or large sandwich which can stretch or pull at the sutured area.
  - Avoid excessive talking, smiling, and laughing which can pull at the sutures and worsen scarring.
  - Use Q-tips or a small children’s toothbrush to brush teeth.
  - Keep lips well-lubricated with petroleum jelly or Aquaphor

### **What to Expect in the Postoperative Period**

The importance of postoperative care for your surgical site cannot be overemphasized. Your role in caring for your surgical wound is extremely important to the success of wound healing and the scar that results.

**1. Bleeding** or oozing at the surgical site is fairly common after surgery. To reduce the possibility of bleeding, please follow the post-op instructions carefully. Some blood spotting of the dressing is expected. \*If bleeding saturates and leaks through your dressing, remove the bandage, move to a seated or lying position and apply firm continuous pressure with gauze pads for 20 minutes (timed). If there is still oozing, repeat pressure for another 20 minutes. Holding pressure will stop most postoperative bleeding. If not, please notify Dr. Redbord at the number provided below.

**2. Swelling, bruising, and numbness** are common after surgery. To help reduce these symptoms, follow the post-op instructions for keeping the area elevated and applying an ice pack. Numbness is usually temporary, but, in some cases, can persist for up to one year or more.

**3. Pain** after surgery is generally mild. If you experience pain or discomfort, take Extra Strength Tylenol® or acetaminophen every 4-6 hours as needed during waking hours. Do not exceed the maximum dose listed on the bottle. If pain remains uncontrolled, notify Dr. Redbord. **DO NOT take pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Midol, Excedrin, or Naprosyn as these products may increase bleeding.**

**4. Drainage or discharge:** A bloody, yellowish or watery discharge is expected during the healing process. Infection seldom occurs when the wound care instructions have been carefully followed. Signs of infection include increased pain, swelling, redness, warmth, and excessive or foul-smelling drainage starting several days after surgery. Please contact our office if you experience signs of infection.

**5. Scar:** Any treatment for skin cancer will leave a scar. **To improve the appearance of your scar, you can massage the healed area (using circular motions with your fingertip) for 15-20 minutes a day starting at least one month after your surgery date.** As a rule of thumb, the line of stitches tends to be longer than the length of the original wound. This is done to avoid unnatural puckering and dimpling of the skin that would result if the incision were not lengthened. Redness and bumpiness of the scar are expected, especially in the first two months due to buried sutures (which will dissolve) and wound contraction. These generally improve as healing progresses, but redness can be expected for up to 6-8 months. In general, a postsurgical scar improves with time and can take up to one year or more to fully mature. Everyone heals differently and the final scar appearance depends greatly upon an individual's ability to heal. Direct sunlight can cause darkening or persistent redness along the scarline and should be avoided in the first few months after your surgery. If you have a history of abnormal scarring, such as hypertrophic scars or keloids, or if there are problems with the healing of your scar, injections or other treatments may be used to optimize the cosmetic result. Dr. Redbord is available for you throughout the healing process to discuss any concerns that arise.

**\*\* If you have any questions or concerns, please call our office 703-938-5700.**

I have been given a copy of postoperative instructions, and I understand my postoperative care. I have been advised to notify the office with any problems, questions or concerns regarding my recovery.

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Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date