

After Your Neurosurgery

Self-care at home

This handout gives self-care instructions for you to follow at home after your neurosurgery.

Pain Control

- For mild to moderate pain, you may take *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs* (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). Follow dose instructions on the bottle.
- We may also give you a short-term prescription for stronger pain medicine. **Take this medicine only as prescribed.** If you need refills, talk with your primary care provider (PCP).
- If you did **not** have a *craniectomy* (removal of bone), you may use an ice pack to help with pain. To protect your scalp, place a clean towel between your scalp and the ice pack.



Get plenty of rest while your body heals from surgery.

Showering

- For **5 days** after surgery, keep your head dry. Cover your head with a shower cap when you take a shower.
- After 5 days, it is OK to wash your hair. To do this:
 - Gently massage your scalp and incision area.
 - Use mild soap with **no** added scents or active ingredients.

Incision Care

- Your incision will be closed with staples or *sutures* (stitches). These will need to be removed 14 days after surgery. This can be done by your PCP or at the Neurosurgery Clinic.
- You do not need to put a bandage on your incision, unless your doctor or nurse tells you to.

- Scabs will form along your incision. Do **not** remove the scabs. When it is OK to wash your hair, this will help the scabs fall off by themselves (see “Showering” on page 1).
- To prevent infection, until your incision is well healed:
 - Do **not** go swimming or put your head under water.
 - Do **not** wear hats or wigs.
 - Do **not** use hair dye or hair dryers. (You may use hair dye before surgery.)
- Check your incision every day. Call the clinic if you have:
 - Signs of infection such as heat, bad-smelling drainage (pus), redness, or a fever higher than 101.5°F (38.6°C)
 - Increased drainage or swelling

Activity

For **2 weeks** after your surgery:

- Do **not** bend over at the waist. It is important not to put any pressure on your head.
- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. (A gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds.)
- Do **not** strain when having a bowel movement. If you have slow bowels or constipation:
 - Eat more fiber. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables.
 - Drink lots of fluids, 6 to 8 full glasses a day.
- Avoid doing any activity that increases your heart rate.
- Walk often to speed your recovery.

What to Expect

After this surgery, it is normal to have:

- **Numbness at your incision site.** You may not regain full feeling for many months. You may also have sharp pains as your incision heals.
- **Swelling after you lie flat for long periods.** It will take time for your body to absorb the fluids that cause the swelling.
- **Drainage.** This should lessen and then stop after several days.
- **Tenderness around your incision.** This will last for several weeks.
- **A dull headache.** This will last for 1 to 2 weeks.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or other healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.







Weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call Harborview Neurosurgery Clinic at 206.744.9340 and press 2.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.744.2500.

When to Call

- Call the clinic if you have:
 - Severe or unusual headache
 - Headache that is better when you lie down
 - Fatigue (feel very tired)
 - A stiff neck
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - Problems with balance or dizziness
 - A hard time walking, or poor coordination
 - Problems with your vision
 - Loss of bowel or bladder control
 - Personality changes, confusion, or memory problems
 - Seizures
- **Call 911 right away** if you have symptoms of a stroke (see graphic below).

Stroke Symptoms

B		E		F		A		S		T	
BALANCE		EYES		FACE		ARMS		SPEECH		TIME	
											
Balance problems, headache, dizzy		Blurred vision		One side of face droops		Arm or leg weakness		Speech problems		Time to call 911!	

Use the letters **BE FAST** to remember what stroke symptoms look like, and what to do when one or more of these symptoms occur.