



# After Your Rectus Abdominis Free Flap

## *Self-care at home*

A rectus abdominis free flap is one way to fill a hole in either the upper or lower jaw. It is often used to replace bone that has been removed for cancer treatment.

This handout gives self-care instructions to follow at home after your surgery.

### **Diet**

Before you leave the hospital, your health care provider will tell you what foods you can and cannot eat when you get home.

### **Wound Care**

#### *Neck Incision*

- Use a solution of half hydrogen peroxide and half saline to clean your neck incision 2 times a day.
- After cleaning your neck incision, apply a light layer of Aquaphor ointment. Do not cover your neck incision. Keeping it open to the air will help it heal.

#### *Abdominal Incision*

- Wash your incision with soap and water every day. Before you leave the hospital, you will learn more about how to care for your abdominal incision at home.

### **Physical Therapy**

- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 10 to 15 pounds for 2 weeks after you leave the hospital.
- Keep doing the physical activity that your physical therapist prescribed during your hospital stay.

### **Follow-up Visit**

You will have a follow-up visit 1 week after you leave the hospital. This appointment will be in the Otolaryngology Clinic with a nurse practitioner. Your appointment will be set before you leave the hospital.

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## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Center: 206-598-4022

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Nurse Voice Mail Line at 206-598-7535. Your call will be returned as soon as possible.

After hours and on holidays and weekends, call 206-598-6190 and ask for the Otolaryngologist on-call to be paged.

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## When to Call the Clinic

Call the Otolaryngology Clinic if you have:

- Fever higher than 100°F (37.8°C) or chills
- Any change in the area of your surgery:
  - Increased pain
  - Swelling
  - Bad smell
  - Draining fluid
- Any change in your neck or abdominal incisions:
  - Increased pain
  - Swelling
  - Redness
  - Draining fluid
  - Incision opens up

## Medicine

When you leave the hospital, you may receive these prescriptions:

- **Pain medicine:** Take this medicine with food, as prescribed, to prevent nausea. Please see the handout you were given on pain medicines.
- **Low-dose aspirin (81 mg):** You will take 1 low-dose aspirin every day for 1 month. You can buy this medicine without a prescription at any drugstore. It will help keep a good blood supply flowing to your surgery site, and this will help with healing.
- **Antibiotics:** You may be advised to take antibiotics to prevent infection. Take them as prescribed.

Call the clinic if you have any problems with pain or with your medicines. Your nurse practitioner will talk with you about your medicines at your 1-week clinic visit.

## To Prevent Constipation

- Take stool softeners. You can buy these without a prescription at any drugstore.
- Drink plenty of fluids.