

## **After Your Craniofacial Surgery**

### *Information for Plastic Surgery patients*

*This handout for Plastic Surgery patients at Harborview Medical Center gives self-care instructions after craniofacial surgery.*

### **Surgery Implants**

To repair your fractures, your surgeon may use plates and screws made of *titanium*, a very light and very strong metal. Man-made (*synthetic*) implants or bone grafts may also be used.

These implants can stay in your body for the rest of your life, but they also can be removed if they cause problems. The metal in your implants will not set off the alarm when you go through airport security.

### **What to Expect**

You may feel numb near your lips, cheek, nose, eyes, teeth, and forehead after your surgery. This can be caused by bruising or by nerve damage from the fractures.

Numbness may last for months or longer, depending on your injuries. For most patients, numbness slowly goes away within 1 year.

### **Self-care**

#### **Swelling and Bruising**

You will have some swelling and bruising after surgery. These symptoms may be the same as you felt after your injury or may be more severe.

You will have the most swelling the 2nd night after surgery. It will stay this way for the next 3 days. Most swelling gets better over the next 2 weeks.

To help lessen swelling when you are sleeping, lie with your head raised above the level of your heart. You can use 2 pillows to raise your head or try sleeping in a recliner.



*Talk with a member of your care team if you have any questions about your surgery or your recovery.*

## **Congestion**

You may have sinus and nasal congestion (stuffy nose) after surgery due to swelling. This is normal. Do **not** use nasal or oral decongestants, since they can slow the healing process. You can use a simple saline spray to help ease the congestion. As your swelling gets less, the congestion will ease, too.

Do **not** blow your nose after surgery. Blowing can cause bleeding or other problems with your healing. If needed, softly dab your nostrils with a tissue.

## **Incision Care**

You might have many incisions after surgery. They may be on your lower eyelids, under your eyebrows, on your scalp, or inside your mouth. These incisions will be closed with *sutures* (stitches).

## **Mouth Care**

- Do not pull on the sutures inside your mouth – they will fall out on their own as your incision heals.
- If your doctor prescribed Peridex mouth rinse, use it 3 times a day. But, do not use it for more than 2 weeks. After about 2 weeks, stop using the Peridex and instead rinse with water or regular mouthwash.
- The day after surgery, start gently cleaning your teeth and gums with a soft toothbrush – even if there are stitches inside your mouth. Gently brush the teeth you can easily reach.

## **Skin and Scalp**

- Some of the sutures on your skin will dissolve over time, but some will not:
  - For the sutures that will not dissolve, your doctor will set up an appointment to remove them. For sutures on your face, this will be about 5 to 7 days after surgery. Sutures on your scalp will be removed about 2 to 3 weeks after surgery.
  - The sutures that can dissolve will fall out on their own as the incision heals.
- It is important to keep incisions clean to lower the risk of infection. Gently clean your incisions once each day with soap and water, unless your doctor gives you other instructions.
- Your doctor may also tell you to apply an antibiotic ointment to your incision. To do this, first gently clean off any old ointment with soap and water, then apply the new layer of ointment.

## **Eye Care**

- Your doctor may tell you to use eye ointments or drops to keep your eyes moist and help healing. Follow the instructions you were given.
- It is normal for your eyelids to be swollen after surgery. This will improve with time. Sutures near your eyelids will fall out on their own after about 1 to 2 weeks.

## **Nose Splints**

If you had surgery on your nose, you may have internal (inside) and external (outside) nose splints:

- Internal splints will be removed in clinic after about 7 to 14 days.
- External splints should protect your nose as the bones heal. Keep these splints dry. They will also be removed in clinic after about 7 to 14 days.

## **Arch Bars and Wires**

*Arch bars* look like metal braces. They are used to keep your jaw in the right position as it heals. Arch bars usually stay in place for 6 to 8 weeks.

Wires, rubber bands, or both may be wrapped around the arch bars to help keep your jaw in place. After your jaw is healed, you will have a short surgery to remove the arch bars. After they are off, be sure to visit the dentist to get your teeth cleaned.

## **Rubber Bands or Elastics**

You may also have rubber bands or elastics in your mouth. These are used to keep your teeth lined up. Your doctor will tell you how many bands to wear. If the bands break or fall off, you will need to replace them.

Before you leave the hospital, your doctor or nurse will teach you how to reapply the bands. We will send you home with extra rubber bands. Always brush your teeth very gently while you have rubber bands.

## **Diet**

After surgery on your face or jaw, you will likely be on either a liquid or a soft food diet:

- **Liquid foods** include foods like milkshakes, soup, and thin yogurt.
- **Soft foods** are those that you could easily squish between your fingers. They include foods like overcooked noodles, boiled or steamed vegetables, and canned fruit.

Stay on the prescribed diet as long as your doctor or nurse has told you, usually about 6 to 8 weeks.

## **Exercise and Activity Limits**

For 2 to 4 weeks after surgery, do **not**:

- Blow your nose
- Drink with a straw
- Bend over at the waist
- Lift anything that weighs more than 15 pounds (2 gallons of milk weigh about 17 pounds)

Do not play contact sports or do other activity that increases your heart and breathing rate until your doctor says it is OK.

## **Pain Control**

Please read the handout “When You Leave the Hospital.”

## **Symptoms of Infection**

Please read the handout “Infection.”

## **Returning to Clinic**

Please read the handout “About Your Follow-up Visit.”

## **When to Call**

Call one of the numbers under “Who to Call” below if you have any of these symptoms, as you may have an infection:

- Fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C)
- More pain
- More swelling
- A bad smell or bad taste in your mouth
- More redness of the skin around your incision
- Cloudy green-yellow drainage from your incision
- Pus (milky-cloudy drainage) from your incision
- Healed wounds that start to drain or re-open

## **Who to Call**

### **Questions or Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns, call the Burn/Plastic Surgery Clinic at 206.744.5735. The clinic answers calls weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### **Urgent Needs**

If you have an urgent care need after hours or on a weekend or holiday, call the Community Care Line nurse at 206.744.2500.

## **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call one of the numbers below if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call the Burn/Plastic Surgery Clinic: 206.744.5735

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call the 24-hour nurse at the Community Care Line: 206.744.2500