Wide Local Excision of Malignant Melanoma or Other Skin Lesion

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how to prepare for your surgery, what to expect, and how to plan for your recovery.

Why do I need this surgery?

You have a skin lesion (sore). Your doctor advises you to have a surgery called wide local excision to remove it. We will take tissue samples during this surgery. They will be tested in the lab by a pathologist, a doctor who specializes in diagnosing diseases.

The amount of tissue we remove depends on:

- The size and thickness of your lesion
- Whether any lymph nodes will be removed

Some patients will also have lymph node mapping with sentinel node biopsy. Your doctor will talk with you about this before your surgery.

How to Prepare

- Do not take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting for 1 week before your surgery. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). See the attached sheet for more information.

- Do not shave any part of your body that you do not already shave every day. If you normally shave near your surgical site, do not shave that area for 2 days (48 hours) before your surgery.

- If you are having lymph node mapping with sentinel node biopsy: You received a prescription for EMLA or LMX-4 cream. You will apply this cream on the morning of your surgery. It will numb the area of your injection and make you more comfortable. Buy this cream at least 2 days before your surgery.
Day Before Surgery

- **Arrival time:** A nurse will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your surgery. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not hear from the nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206.598.6334.

  The nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and remind you:
  - Not to eat or drink after a certain time
  - Which of your regular medicines to take or not take, and to sip **only** enough water to swallow your pills
  - To plan for someone to drive you home or to ride home with you in a taxi or bus

- **Shower:** Take a shower the night before your surgery:
  - Use the antibacterial soap your nurse gave you to wash your body.
  - Do **not** use the antibacterial soap on your face and hair. (See directions that came with the soap.) Use your own soap and shampoo on your face and hair.
  - Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothes.

Surgery Day

At Home

- **Eating and drinking:** Follow the instructions the nurse gave you about when to stop eating and drinking.

- **Shower:** Take another shower with the antibacterial soap. Follow the same steps as you did the night before.

- **Medicines:** Follow the instructions the nurse gave you about which medicines to take or not take. Remember to sip **only** enough water to swallow your pills.

- **If you are having lymph node mapping, with sentinel node biopsy:**
  - Apply the EMLA or LMX-4 cream to your injection site **2 hours before** your lymph node mapping. Put the cream directly on your injection site and 1 inch in all directions beyond the site. Use a large amount, as if you were frosting a cake.
  - Cover the area with plastic wrap, such as Saran Wrap.

At the Hospital

- **Heating blanket:** While you wait to go into the operating room, we will cover you with a heating blanket. Keeping your body warm helps reduce your risk of infection. Please ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.
After Your Surgery

For Your Safety
Medicine given during and after your surgery will affect you. For 24 hours after your surgery do not:

- Drive or travel alone
- Use machinery
- Drink alcohol
- Sign legal papers or make important decisions
- Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

Incision Care
Your doctor will talk with you about your incision and what kind of dressing (bandage) will be used. Your incision will be closed in one of 3 ways: with sutures (stitches), a tissue flap with stitches, or a skin graft.

If You Have Stitches or a Tissue Flap
You will receive incision care instructions before you are discharged from the hospital.

- If your incision is closed with stitches:
  - A dressing (bandage) will cover your incision. You may remove this dressing 48 hours after your surgery and then shower.
  - If your stitches are beneath the skin, they will dissolve on their own.
  - If the stitches are across your incision, you will need to come to the clinic 1 to 2 weeks after your surgery to have the stitches removed.

- If you have a tissue flap:
  - The flap will be held in place with stitches.
  - You will need to visit the clinic 1 to 2 weeks after your surgery to have the stitches removed.

If You Have a Skin Graft and Dressing
For a skin graft, some skin will be shaved off your thigh and placed where your lesion was removed.

- A thick “bolster” dressing will cover your skin graft for 1 week after your surgery. This dressing helps your body accept the skin graft. Do not get this dressing wet. We will remove the bolster dressing over your graft at your first follow-up clinic visit.

- You will also have a clear plastic dressing over the area where skin was taken for your graft. Leave this dressing in place. We will change it and replace it with another plastic dressing at your first follow-up visit.
• Red fluid will collect under the plastic. This is normal, and it helps speed healing. If the fluid leaks around the edges, you can add a clear plastic dressing or use gauze or a panty liner to absorb the fluid.

• After we remove the dressing over your graft:
  – You may shower, but do not let water directly hit your graft. Cover it with plastic wrap. Tape the edges to your skin to keep the area dry.
  – Use antibiotic ointment to keep the graft edges moist. Your doctor may advise you to cover your graft site with petroleum gauze (gauze that is saturated with petroleum jelly). Use the gauze for 1 to 2 weeks. Change it every day, or as often your doctor instructs.
  – Protect your graft site from the sun. Use sunscreen after it is healed.

Pain Control
When you go home, use the pain medicine your doctor prescribed for you. It is important to take it before your pain is severe.

Constipation
Avoid getting constipated. Please read the handout “Constipation After Your Operation.”

Return to Work
Talk with your doctor about when you may return to work.

Pathology Results
Pathology results are the findings from tests that are done on the tissue that was removed during your surgery. It will take at least 5 work days to get these results. Your provider will call you with these results, or will give them to you at your next office visit.

When to Call
Call your doctor or nurse if you have:
• Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing
• A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
• Shaking and chills
• Any sign of infection in your incision: redness, increasing pain, swelling, drainage that smells bad, or a change in the type or amount of drainage
• Nausea or vomiting, or both
• A growing fullness beneath your skin where your drain site was
• Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit