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.

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.

Get plenty of rest while your body heals from surgery.
• 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

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BALANCE</td>
<td>EYES</td>
<td>FACE</td>
<td>ARMS</td>
<td>SPEECH</td>
<td>TIME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balance problems, headache, dizzy</td>
<td>Blurred vision</td>
<td>One side of face droops</td>
<td>Arm or leg weakness</td>
<td>Speech problems</td>
<td>Time to call 911!</td>
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Use the letters BE FAST to remember what stroke symptoms look like, and what to do when one or more of these symptoms occur.