

Treating Lymphedema with Lymphaticovenular Anastomosis

What to expect and how to prepare

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

What is lymphedema?

Lymphedema is tissue swelling that occurs when lymph fluid cannot drain normally back into your blood.

What is lymphaticovenular anastomosis?

Lymphaticovenular anastomosis is surgery to connect your lymphatic vessels to your veins. This allows the lymph fluid to drain into your blood vessels. This might help reduce swelling or keep it from getting worse.

How to Prepare for Your Surgery

1 Week Before

- Starting 1 week before your surgery, do **not** take any aspirin or other products that affect blood clotting. Two of these are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and others) and naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, and others).
- You will go home the same day as your surgery. Arrange for someone to drive you home from the hospital.

2 Days Before

- 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.



Talk with your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your surgery.

24 Hours Before

- **Shower:** Take a shower the night before your surgery.
 - Use the antibacterial soap (Hibiclens) that your nurse gave you to wash your body from the neck down. Do **not** use Hibiclens on your face, hair, or private parts. (See directions that came with the soap.)
 - Use your own soap and shampoo on your face, hair, and private parts.
 - Use clean towels to dry off, and put on clean clothing.
 - If needed, you can buy Hibiclens at any pharmacy or drugstore.
- **When to arrive for surgery:** Operating room (OR) staff will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your surgery. If you are having surgery on a Monday, they will call you the Friday before. If you do receive this call by 5 p.m., please call 206.598.6541.

The OR staff will tell you when to come to the hospital and will remind you:

- Not to eat or drink after a certain time
- To have someone drive you home

Day of Surgery

At Home

- **Shower:** Take another shower the morning of your surgery. Follow the same instructions as you did for your shower the night before surgery.
- **Medicines:** If you were told you to take some of your medicines before your surgery, take them with **only** small sips of water.

At the Hospital

- **Heating blanket:** We will cover you with a heating blanket while you wait to go into the OR. This will warm your body and reduce your risk of infection. Ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.

What to Expect After Your Surgery

Precautions and Self-care to Speed Your Recovery

- 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 any legal papers or make important decisions
 - Be responsible for children, pets, or an adult who needs care

Incision Care and Healing

- Your incisions will be about 1 inch long. They will be closed with sutures that will dissolve on their own. White tape called Steri-strips will be over the sutures.
- If there is a dressing (bandage) over your incision, you may remove it after 48 hours. You do not need to replace the dressing.
- You may shower 48 hours after surgery. After that, shower every day, allowing soapy water to gently run over your incisions.
- Do **not** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, or go swimming until all of your incisions are healed.

Garments and Therapy

- If you were wearing a compression garment before surgery, you may start wearing it again 4 weeks after surgery.
- You may start physical therapy, massage, and using a compression pump 4 weeks after surgery. Keep doing the therapies you were doing before surgery until you notice a change in your swelling. Talk with your doctor if you have any questions.

Activity and Return to Work

- For 2 to 4 weeks after surgery, avoid exercise or sports that increase your heart beat or make you breathe faster.
- Avoid activities or situations that may cause swelling.
- Do **not** fly for 2 weeks after surgery.
- Slowly resume your usual activities.
- Most people take 2 weeks off work to recover.

Pain Control

To manage your pain, use extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol and other brands) as directed, or take the pain medicine your doctor prescribed for you.

Follow-up Visits

- Your first follow-up visit will be 10 to 14 days after surgery.
- You will have other follow-up visits at 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year after surgery. We will check your progress at these visits.

When to Call

Call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery or your doctor if you have:

- Bleeding or drainage that soaks your dressing (hold gentle pressure on the site while you call)
- A fever higher than 100.5°F (38°C)
- Chills or shaking
- Any sign of infection in your incision:
 - Redness
 - Increased pain
 - Increased swelling
 - Bad-smelling drainage
 - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea or vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Questions?

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

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call the Center for Reconstructive Surgery at 206.598.1217 and press 2.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, please call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the resident on call for Plastic Surgery.