

Your Facelift

What to expect and how to prepare

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

Facelift Surgery

Both men and women choose facelift surgery to help them look younger. A facelift operation removes excess skin from the face, neck, and jawline. It also tightens the tissues that are under the skin. The most obvious results of a facelift are in the neck and jawline.

A facelift can be done at the same time as other procedures, such as a brow lift or eyelid surgery (*blepharoplasty*). Your plastic surgeon will talk with you about which options will help achieve the results you want.



How to Prepare

Medicines

- Stop taking all aspirin products or anti-inflammatory medicines and other products that affect blood clotting 2 weeks before your day of surgery. Stopping these medicines before surgery will help control bleeding during your operation.
These include:
 - Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and other brands)
 - Naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve, and other brands)
 - Vitamin E
 - Some herbal supplements (we will tell you if you need to stop any that you take)
- If you are taking Renova or Retin-A, stop taking it 1 week before your surgery.
- If these medicines are not stopped, your surgery will be cancelled.

A facelift can be done at the same time as other procedures. Talk with your doctor about what will work best for you.



Before you leave for the hospital, set up a comfortable place in your home where you will be able to relax after surgery.

Smoking

- If you smoke, do not smoke for at least 3 weeks before your surgery. Smoking greatly increases your risk for complications and will also slow your healing process after surgery.

Shaving

- 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.

Preparing for Your Recovery Time

- You may want to prepare and freeze meals to have ready for your recovery time. You will be most comfortable eating **soft foods** after your surgery.
- Set up a recovery area in your home. This area might include pillows, books on tape, a radio, cold compresses, etc.

24 Hours Before Surgery

- **Take 2 showers:** Take 1 shower the night before and a second shower the morning of 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 clothing.

- **Arrival time:** Your arrival time is determined the day before your surgery. The pre-surgery nurse will call you by 5 p.m. the night before your operation. If you are having surgery on a Monday, the nurse will call you the Friday before. If you do not hear from the pre-surgery nurse by 5 p.m., please call 206-598-6334.
- The pre-surgery nurse will tell you when to come to the hospital and will remind you:
 - Not to eat or drink after midnight the night before your surgery
 - Which of your regular medicines to take or not take
 - To sip only enough water to swallow your pills

Day of Surgery

- On the day of surgery, wear comfortable clothing that is easy to take off. We recommend a shirt or blouse that opens in the front, not a top that goes on over your head.
- **Heating blanket:** To reduce your risk of infection, you will be covered with a heating blanket to warm your body while you wait to go into the operating room. Ask for a heating blanket if you do not receive one.
- You will go home several hours after your operation. Because you had general anesthesia:
 - You will need someone to drive you home after your surgery.
 - You will need to have a responsible person stay with you for the first 24 hours.
 - Arrange to have someone care for you for the first 2 to 3 days after surgery.

What to Expect After Surgery

Precautions

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

- Drive or travel alone
- Drink alcohol
- Sign any legal papers
- Be responsible for the care of another person
- Use machinery

Activity

- Do not drink alcohol or drive while you are taking prescription pain medicine and for 24 hours after you stop taking it.
- For 3 days and nights after your operation, sit upright and sleep in a lounge chair or recliner, with your upper body leaning back but not flat. This will help reduce swelling.
- Restrict all your activity for at least 2 weeks after surgery.
- Do not bend with your head below your waist, pick up heavy items, or exercise for at least 3 weeks after surgery.
- You may walk and use stairs.

- Avoid strenuous workouts for 4 weeks after surgery. Heavy exercise will raise your blood pressure and cause more swelling, which will delay the healing of your incisions.
- Do **NOT** turn your head from side to side for 2 weeks. Instead, rotate your upper body when you look to the side.

Dressings

You will have a special facelift dressing (bandage) under your chin and over the top of your head for support and comfort. This is a bulky dressing. It will be changed in clinic at your follow-up visit the day after your surgery.

Follow-up Visit

You will have a follow-up visit with your surgeon the day after your operation. This appointment will be in the Surgical Specialties Center. It will be scheduled before you leave the hospital on the day of your surgery.

At this follow-up visit, your first dressing will be removed. A less bulky dressing will be put on.

Self-care

Dressing Changes

- After your dressing is changed at your follow-up visit, leave the second dressing in place for 48 hours.
- Remove the second dressing on day 3. After this:
 - You may shower using warm water. Avoid hot water. Your scalp may be less able than usual to sense temperature, and you could scald yourself. Each patient's sensation returns at a different rate, so make sure you are cautious until you have full sensation again.
 - Start wearing a stretchy face-wrap you can buy at a pharmacy or medical supply store. It should fit under your chin and over your head, and cover your ears. Wear this wrap **all the time** until you return for your 1-week follow-up visit. Remove it only when you shower.

Incision Care

Starting 3 days after your surgery, you may apply Polysporin or Bacitracin ointment to your incisions 2 times a day.

Pain Management

Use extra-strength acetaminophen (Extra Strength Tylenol) or the pain medicine your doctor prescribed for you.

Protect Your Skin

Your skin will be more sensitive for a while after surgery. Because of this:

- Avoid using curling irons and very hot blow dryers until your full sensation has returned.
- You can start using makeup 7 days after your surgery, but do not put any makeup on your incisions.
- When you are in the sun, use sunscreen with an SPF of 20 or higher and wear hats, scarves, and sunglasses for at least 6 months.

Things to Remember

Following these guidelines will speed your recovery and make you more comfortable:

- Keep your head elevated as much as possible to reduce swelling.
- Apply cold compresses for the first 3 days to minimize swelling and discomfort.
- Do not smoke or be around secondary smoke during your recovery.
- Limit how much sodium (salt) you eat. Avoid salty foods such as chips and cured meats, and do not add extra salt to other foods.
- Do not color your hair for 4 to 6 weeks after your surgery.
- Do not swim for 4 weeks after your surgery.
- Avoid direct sunlight.

Medicines After Surgery

For 2 weeks after surgery, do **not** take medicines that can cause bleeding unless your surgeon has told you it is OK. Some of these are:

- Aspirin
- Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and other brands)
- Naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve, and other brands)
- Vitamin E
- Some herbal supplements

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
 - Foul-smelling drainage
 - A change in the type or amount of drainage
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Concerns that cannot wait until your follow-up visit

Questions?

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

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call Surgical Specialties, 206-598-4477.

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