

Southwest Ear, Nose & Throat

Head & Neck Surgery

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Allergy & Sinus

Hearing & Otology

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POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR NECK SURGERY

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

- Your recovery will depend on why you had surgery, the type of surgery performed, and your previous activity level.
- You may shower and wash gently with soap and water over the incision 24 hours after surgery. Do not scrub the incision site.
- You will see swelling or bruising develop in the area around the incision beginning 1-3 days after surgery. You may also notice swelling, firmness, a pulling sensation, or even some trouble swallowing. This often increases over the first 1-2 weeks and then begins to resolve over 6-8 weeks. These are normal sensations.

INCISION SITE

- Your scar will be most visible for the first 1-2 months after surgery, improve significantly over 2-3 months, and gradually fade over the next 8-12 months.
- UV rays from sunlight can make your scar darker than normal. Once your surgical dressing has come off and any surgical adhesive has dissolved, please use sunblock (SPF>30) over your incision on a daily basis and reapply frequently when outdoors for long periods of time.
- Do not expose your incision to the lights used in tanning salons.
- Allow one full year for your incision site and scar to take its final form, color, and consistency. The scars are often barely noticeable, but everyone heals their scars in their own way. If you are concerned about the appearance of your scar after a year, there are options for treatment.
- The skin just above and below your incision will feel numb. This will usually improve over several months, although this can be permanent in some patients.
- You may apply a cold pack over your incision to relieve any pain and help minimize swelling. This is most beneficial in the first 24 hours after surgery.
- Do not be afraid to move your neck. You may move your head in all four directions. Be careful about looking upward to any great extent so the edges of the incision do not separate.
- Your voice may be slightly hoarse or weak after surgery. This is normal and does not mean there was any damage to the nerves that make the vocal cords move. The breathing tube used during surgery often irritates the vocal cords. Your voice will usually return to normal within 6-8 weeks after surgery and often after only several days.
- Your incision was closed with absorbable sutures underneath the skin as well as skin glue. The skin glue turns a dark purple color. This is normal. The skin glue will come off in small pieces after about 10-14 days, revealing the underlying skin incision.
- Do not apply ointments, powders, Vitamin E cream, moisturizers, or anti-scar creams to the incision until you see your physician back in clinic for your postoperative visit.

DIET

- Unless otherwise instructed by your physician, there are no dietary restrictions.

WORK AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- You may resume light activities as soon as you are discharged. You may gradually increase your activity after the first week. After four weeks, you may resume full activities, including exercise.
- You may drive a vehicle as long as you are not taking any narcotic pain medications and can freely move your head in all four directions without being limited by pain.
- If your job does not require strenuous activity, you may return to work as soon as you would like (usually within 1-2 weeks). If your job requires heavy lifting or strenuous physical activity, wait to return to work until after your post-operative appointment.

PAIN MANAGEMENT

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is most helpful for any pain experienced after most neck surgeries. After four days, NSAIDs such as ibuprofen and naproxen may also be used. In general, over the counter acetaminophen and anti-inflammatories are more helpful than stronger narcotic pain medicines for these types of surgeries.
- To prevent overdosing on acetaminophen, do not take it at the same time as a narcotic medication.
- A narcotic may be given to you at the time of discharge. Do not feel you need to automatically fill this prescription. If you are doing well with over the counter medications alone, this is fine. The prescription is to be filled only if you feel you need it. Do not waste your money. Do not drive a car, operate other heavy equipment, or drink alcohol while taking narcotic medications.
- Narcotics may cause constipation. Stool softeners (Colace), fiber (fruits, bran, vegetables), and extra fluid may help. A stimulant laxative (Senokot) may also help.
- Most patients experience some pain from the incision and may experience a sore throat from the breathing tube for several days. You may also experience stiffness or soreness in your shoulders, back, or neck, as well as tension headaches. These are common symptoms and are best treated with Tylenol, warm compresses, and light massage.
- For a sore throat, you can try either warm or cool liquids for relief. You may also use throat lozenges or other soothing ingredients as needed.
- The skin just above and below your incision will feel numb. This will usually improve over several months, although this can be permanent in some patients.

RESUMING HOME MEDICATIONS

- Resume all medications you were taking at home unless directed otherwise.

FEVER AND INFECTION

- Call if you develop a fever greater than 102 degrees Fahrenheit. We do not recommend you regularly take your temperature. Take your temperature only if you feel like you have a fever. It is common to have a low-grade fever in the later afternoon/early evening. This does not mean you have an infection.
- Call if you develop a productive cough with yellow or green sputum.