

POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS: FULL THICKNESS SKIN GRAFT

Wound Care

Your skin graft has been bandaged with a pressure dressing intended to stay on until sutures are removed. If the bandage does not stay on for the entire time, then follow these instructions:

There will be a bright yellow bandage tied on top of the grafted area. This is to keep the graft in place. **PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE THIS YELLOW BANDAGE.** Gently clean the area around the yellow bandage with Q-Tips that have been moistened with water, and then dry the area with a dry Q-Tip. Gently apply **Vaseline** to the area with a clean Q-Tip. Cover the wound area with a Band-aid or non-stick pad, gauze, and paper tape.

For the area where the graft was **taken from** (not the area where the graft was placed), the bandage can be changed daily starting the day after surgery. Remove the previous bandage, clean the area with water, and apply Vaseline and either a Band-Aid or non-stick gauze (e.g. Telfa). Do not apply antibiotic ointments, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide or soap directly to the wound.

Bleeding

It is common for the surgical sites to ooze or bleed, especially in the first several hours after surgery. This can be controlled by removing the bandage we applied and then applying **constant direct pressure** to the bleeding site with a clean bandage or paper towel for 20 minutes (without peeking). If the incision continues to bleed after this time, call the office at 731-664-0227. After hours, contact our call center at 731-422-0330.

Swelling

Swelling is common after surgery. Some people are more prone to swelling, and some surgical sites swell more significantly than others (eyes, fingers, legs). Ice and elevation above the heart will help with this. Apply an ice pack over the dressing – on for 20 minutes and off for 1 hour. Repeat until bedtime. You may continue this, if necessary, as long as the swelling persists.

Smoking

To promote better healing and reduce the chance of complications, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU REFRAIN FROM SMOKING until the sutures are removed. **Why?** Smoking causes constriction of small blood vessels in the skin that are required for good wound healing. Without these blood vessels to provide nutrients to the skin, it will not heal well.

Showering

You may shower starting the morning after surgery but keep **the pressure bandage that is covering the graft ON and DRY until sutures are removed.**

Pain Control After Surgery

Pain, redness, and some swelling is normal and expected after a procedure. **This is part of the healing process and represents your body's normal ability to produce inflammation.** Some patients swell more than others, some bleed more than others, and some need more pain control than others. The tools below should help you during your recovery. If you have severe breakthrough pain after trying all of these methods, please call 731-664-0227. After hours, contact our call center at 731-422-0330.

Ice: Apply an ice pack to the bandaged area for 20 minutes, then take it off for 40 minutes. Repeat every hour until you go to bed on the day of surgery and as needed thereafter. Do not apply the ice directly to the wound. Use the ice OVER the bandage. Keep the bandage dry.

Elevate: Keep the surgical site elevated above your heart as much as possible to help with swelling. Use a recliner or pillows to assist you. This is especially important for surgical sites on the legs and arms, which will swell with walking and standing.

Medicine: Take 400mg of Ibuprofen (or 200mg if you have kidney problems) when you get home. 3 hours later, take 500 mg of Tylenol (one Extra strength tab or capsule). 3 hours later, repeat the dose of Ibuprofen. Continue alternating these two medications every 3 hours as needed for pain control. Do not exceed the doses advised above.

DO NOT take alka seltzer, drink alcohol for the first 48 hours after surgery, or apply heat around the wound.

Activity

Resting is a very important part of the healing process. If you move the surgical site frequently, it will be painful, more likely to split open, and more likely to develop track marks. For the first 48 hours, any activity that increases your heart rate increases your risk of problems. Avoid **all** strenuous exercise, bending, lifting, aerobic walking, recreational sports, etc... For the next few weeks, avoid anything that will stress the surgical site. The wound will regain strength slowly over the next few months.

Wound Appearance

Skin grafts go through many stages of healing as the transplanted skin "learns" to grow at the new site. It can range in color from purple to bright red to light pink. This is normal and represents the blood vessels that grow and remodel at the wound site. It will look out of place until your skin naturally heals. This can take up to 1 year.

If you have any questions during the healing process, please contact our office for an appointment. There are many things we can do to help blend a graft with the surrounding skin, but only after it has been allowed to heal at least 6 months.

If the skin around the wound becomes increasingly red, warm, and painful to touch after 3-4 days, has purulent drainage, or if you develop fever or chills, please call our office at 731-664-0227 for an appointment.

More Information

If you'd like more information or prefer video instruction, you can watch the American College of Mohs Surgery video about post-operative care using the link below. Scan the QR code with your smartphone camera and click the YouTube link to view the video. Make sure your phone speaker is on.

