

## **Head and Neck Oncology**

### **Wound Care Instructions Following Reconstruction**

Please shower daily. To lower the risk of infection, we want you to keep your incisions clean.

#### **Precautions:**

- Please be very gentle in caring for your incisions. Do not scratch or scrub the incisions.
- When showering, simply allow soapy water to run over the incisions, rinse, and pat dry. Gentle rubbing to remove dry or crusted material on the incisions is ok.
- Avoid soaking your incisions in water (bathtub, hot tub, pool) for 4 weeks as this could increase your risk of infection.
- Sutures will be removed at your next follow-up appointment with your surgeon (unless dissolvable stitches were used).
- Unless your care team instructs to keep the wound covered, it is ok to leave your incisions open to air.
- Do NOT apply Bacitracin, Neosporin, or any other antibiotic ointment on your incisions. Use only a thin layer of Vaseline 2-3 times a day as needed (to keep moist).
- Once your incision is healed (approximately 2-3 weeks) you may start to apply scar creams/lotions as approved by your care team.

#### **Care of the skin graft on forearm or lower leg:**

- The skin graft covering the forearm or leg will be covered by a cast during your hospital stay. After this cast is removed, the skin graft dressing needs to be changed once a day.
- The dressing on this site usually consists of a special yellow dressing (Xeroform), which is placed on top of the skin graft and then covered with gauze and pads to protect the area.
- Do not let anything rub against the skin graft for 3-4 weeks. This may cause the skin graft to separate from the underlying tissue.
- Keep the area clean and wash the area around the skin graft in the shower. Allow water to run over the graft, but do not wash the graft itself for 3-4 weeks or until instructed by your doctor. Gently pat dry and apply Vaseline.
- If you have dried blood crusting around your incision site, please clean the area(s) with half strength hydrogen peroxide. Remember to rinse off the area with normal saline solution or clean water. Our care team will provide instructions based on your wound condition.
- It generally takes about three months for your wound to fully heal.

**Care of skin graft donor site (thigh):**

- The site where the skin graft was taken will heal slowly over the next 2-3 weeks.
- There will be a clear dressing over this site. This can be removed when you are at home in the shower.
- Wash the skin graft donor site gently with soapy water. Pat dry and cover with Vaseline. You will want to then cover the area with a non-adherent dressing (like Telfa) to prevent the Vaseline from getting onto your clothes.
- The skin from the edges will slowly heal over this wound. Once the skin has fully healed over, Vaseline and dressing are no longer needed.

**General Information**

Typically, home healthcare and wound care supplies will be arranged based on your insurance coverage. At the time of discharge, our inpatient team will provide you with up to 3 days of wound care dressing supplies and wound care instructions as needed. In some cases, if you don't have insurance coverage, our case manager will provide additional self-pay options.

Call the ENT clinic promptly if you develop a fever greater than 101.5 degrees, or if you notice bleeding or a foul-smelling discharge. This could be a symptom of infection and that requires immediate attention.