

## Post-surgical Helpful Information

### Pain Control

- Narcotic pain meds, in general, have 3 major side effects: Drowsiness, Nausea and Constipation.
- You MUST have something in your stomach whenever you take a pain medication. Even if it's in the middle of the night. You do not have to have a full meal; a few crackers will suffice.
- If your surgeon says it is okay for you to take Ibuprofen, Advil or Motrin, you may take up to 600mg every 6 hours as needed. Please do not exceed 2,400mg in a 24-hour period.
- Pain is variable person to person and surgery to surgery. Surgical pain is typically the worst for the first 2-3 days post-operatively. You should plan on staying on a schedule with your pain medications during this time. If you have had a nerve block or received local anesthetic at the surgical site, pain medications should be initiated as soon as you begin to feel pain unless otherwise instructed.
- **Please call your physician if you are having unexpected pain or pain that is not controlled by medication.**

### Constipation

Constipation is difficulty or pain with your bowel movement. Narcotics, anesthesia, dehydration and bed rest can lead to constipation after surgery.

To prevent constipation after a procedure:

- Drink plenty of fluids (water is best).
- Get up and move! Rest is important for recovery, but it is also important to move around every couple of hours throughout the day. Besides preventing constipation, moving will help prevent dangerous blood clots and pneumonia.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Take an over the counter stool softener or laxative as needed.

### Blood Clots (DVT or PEs)

Blood clots can block the flow of blood through a vein, causing a decrease in oxygen supply. When this occurs inside a vein deep inside the body, it's known as a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). When this occurs inside the lung, it's known as a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). A recent procedure increases your risk for DVT or PE.

To prevent a DVT or PE after your procedure:

- Get up and move. Activity helps improve blood flow and reduces the risk for clots.
- Move your legs and flex your feet during periods of inactivity.
- Wear pressure stocking as prescribed by your doctor.

- Do not smoke, especially if you are also taking birth control pills or estrogen.
- If your doctor prescribed blood thinners, take them as indicated.

Warning signs of DVT or PE:

- Change in skin color, increased warmth, swelling or pain in one leg.
- Sudden chest pain, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate or bloody sputum.

**If you experience any signs of DVT or PE, call your doctor or 911 immediately.**

### **Infection Prevention**

Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection. However, if you see any of the following signs and symptoms of infection, call your doctor immediately.

- Redness, severe pain or swelling at the incision
- Fever or chills
- Cloudy drainage from the incision
- Drainage from the incision that is tan, yellow or green

Most patients do not require antibiotics after surgery. However, if your doctor has prescribed an antibiotic, take it as prescribed until it is gone. Other ways to prevent infection include:

- Care for your incision as instructed by your doctor.
- Wash your hands often, especially before caring for your wound.
- If you need to clean your incision, wash it with soap and water. Pat the incision dry and leave it uncovered. If your doctor has specific wound care instructions, follow them as directed.

### **Handwashing**

Keeping your hands clean is the number one way to prevent the spread of infection. Most bacteria on our hands are on the fingertips and under the fingernails. Damp hands are 1000x more likely to spread bacteria than dry hands.

Remember to always wash hands:

- Before and after caring for your wound.
- After blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing.
- After using the bathroom, changing diapers, or cleaning up a child who has used the bathroom.
- After touching an animal, animal food or treats, animal cages or animal waste.
- Before and after preparing meals.

### **Preventing Falls**

Medications given to you during your procedure may affect you more than you realize. Anesthesia, narcotics, tranquilizers and other medications may make you dizzy and disoriented.

Here are some tips for preventing falls:

- Take your time and move slowly, especially when changing positions.
- Have a responsible adult with you for the first 24 hours after your procedure.
- Use your assistive device to walk if indicated.
- Keep all walking paths in your home clear.
- Have someone with you when navigating stairs.
- Wear slippers or socks with traction soles or shoes.

If you fall after your procedure:

- If you are not obviously bleeding, notify your doctor as soon as possible.
- **If you fall and are bleeding, apply pressure to the site that is bleeding. Call 911 or go to the Emergency Department. Do not delay in seeking assistance.** A healthcare provider may be needed to control your bleeding.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**When should I restart my blood thinners? (For example: aspirin, coumadin, warfarin, heparin, lovenox)?**

Follow your surgeon's or primary care physician's instructions on the best time to restart your blood thinners. If you did not receive specific information on restarting this or any other medication, call your doctor's office.

**Should I be on antibiotics?**

Most patients are not on antibiotics following a surgery or procedure. If there is a concern regarding post-operative infection, your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic. If you are given an antibiotic, it is very important to finish the medication.

**When should I remove my scopolamine (anti-nausea) patch?**

You can remove your scopolamine patch 24-72 hours after discharge. Possible side effects from a scopolamine patch include: dry mouth, dilated pupils, dizziness and blurred vision. To dispose of the patch, fold patch in half, sticky sides together. Don't touch your eyes after removing the patch as the medication could cause dilated pupils and blurry vision. Make sure you wash your hands and the site after disposing of the patch.

**What are my activity restrictions?**

For the first 24 hours after anesthesia, get a lot of rest and take it easy! Don't forget to flex and move your legs while resting to prevent blood clots. After the first 24 hours, follow your doctor's recommendations for activity.

### **When can I drive?**

Do not drive for the first 24 hours after anesthesia and at any time while on narcotic pain medications. These medications alter your judgement and slow your response time. After you are off all pain medications, follow your doctor's instructions for driving.

### **What food restrictions do I have after my procedure?**

For the first 24 hours after anesthesia, we recommend avoiding heavy, greasy foods that could irritate the stomach and cause nausea. Drink plenty of fluids so you can rehydrate your body. Otherwise, follow your doctor's recommendations for diet.

### **When should I use my brace or crutches?**

Follow your doctor's specific instructions regarding braces and crutches.

### **How soon should I return to work?**

We generally recommend resting at home for the first 24 hours after anesthesia. Otherwise, follow your doctor's recommendation for returning to work.

### **Why am I experiencing itching after surgery?**

Skin irritation and itching can be caused by anesthesia, taking narcotic pain medications or skin irritation from the tape and adhesives used during your procedure. This should resolve in a few days. Tips for dealing with the itching include: applying over-the-counter lotions to the area, taking an antihistamine such as Benadryl or calling your doctor to have your pain medication adjusted.

### **Why am I having trouble urinating after surgery?**

Certain drugs such as anti-nausea and narcotic pain medications can cause spasm in the muscle that control urinary flow. **If you cannot urinate and have a full bladder, call your doctor.** You may need to go to the Emergency Department to have a catheter placed.