

# Thoracic Outlet Syndrome Post-Op Instructions

**Chandu Vemuri MD FACS**  
Assistant Professor of Surgery  
Section of Vascular Surgery

**Frankel Cardiovascular Center**  
1500 E Medical Center Drive SPC 5867  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109  
T: (734) 763-0250  
F: (734) 647-9867  
[cvemuri@umich.edu](mailto:cvemuri@umich.edu)



**FRANKEL**  
**CARDIOVASCULAR CENTER**  
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

The following instructions will be helpful during your recovery. They are designed to be general guidelines. Remember, everyone recovers differently.

### **What follow-up care will I receive?**

Prior to leaving the hospital you will be scheduled for two follow-up appointments with your surgeon:

#### **1. Appointment for Drain Removal**

- You will see your doctor approximately 48 hours after you leave the hospital to have your drain removed. After your doctor removes the drain, you will have a chest x-ray. If the chest x-ray result is satisfactory, you will be able to go home.
- Following drain removal, you must remain in Ann Arbor within 10 miles of the medical center for 24 hours due to the chance of a collapsed lung (pneumothorax) occurring.
- **Call 911 immediately** if you have chest pain and shortness of breath. These are signs and symptoms of a collapsed lung.
- If you have no complications after **24 hours** you may leave Ann Arbor. Prior to leaving Ann Arbor call the office at (888) 287 - 1082 and let the staff know you will be leaving the area.

#### **2. Post- Operative Appointment**

- Approximately 4 weeks after discharge you will return to see your surgeon.
- During this visit, you will meet with the outpatient physical therapy team. It is **your responsibility** to call to schedule an appointment with a Physical Therapist at (734) 936 - 7070.
- Please try to schedule with the same Physical Therapist you saw at your initial appointment (venous and arterial patients will typically not meet the Physical Therapists until after surgery).

## **When do I need to seek emergency care?**

Call **9-1-1 immediately** if you develop:

- Sudden onset of chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Sudden arm swelling
- Difficulty with speech
- One side of the face dropping or feeling numb
- Weakness or numbness on one side of the body
- Unexplained clumsiness or falling
- Sudden severe headache

Call 911 if you believe you are experiencing a true emergency.

## **What steps should I take to monitor my health at home?**

Take your temperature **each morning** before eating or drinking and at any time you think you may have a fever. Keep a record of your daily temperature.

## **When should I call my doctor?**

Please call us if you develop any of the following signs and symptoms:

- Temperature of 100.5°F or higher. It is not uncommon to have a low-grade fever after surgery.
- New redness around the incisions or if pus drains from the incisions.
- Opening of the incision
- Swelling
- Drainage with a foul odor at the incision site.
- Severe bleeding occurs. Apply direct pressure to the area.
- Severe abdominal pain or intractable vomiting occurs.

## **Who should I call if I have questions?**

- **Call 911** in the event of any emergency.

- **Monday- Friday 8:00am - 4:30pm:** call (888) 287 - 1082  
Ask to speak to the Vascular Surgery Nurse if you have any of the signs or symptoms above.
- **After 4:30pm or on weekends or holidays:** call (734) 936 - 6267 and ask to speak to the Vascular Surgery Resident on-call.

### **What pain medications will I receive after surgery?**

You will receive prescriptions for pain medication after surgery. These usually consist of:

- **A long-acting medication** (MS Contin or OxyContin®)
- **A short-acting medication** (Percocet®, Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, or Vicodin®). Covered by the office for 12 weeks' maximum.

Please refer to the Opioid Agreement that you signed before surgery for more specifics on narcotic pain medications. The clinic nurse will review the weaning schedule for narcotics with you at your drain pull appointment.

### **How will I refill my pain medications?**

Call the refill line Monday-Friday during business hours to get short-acting medication refills: **(888) 287 - 1082**.

We will not refill the long acting medication. By law, you need a doctor signed prescription for the short-acting medication so usually we will mail the prescription to you. Please call ahead to allow enough time for us to get the prescription to you. We do not refill medications on weekends or evenings and it can take up to 72 hours to process.

### **What other medications will I receive?**

Your doctor will give you prescriptions before you leave the hospital. Most

patients are prescribed:

- stool softener
- anti-inflammatory
- muscle relaxer
- anti-nausea medication
- blood thinner (venous and arterial patients only)

It is important to have your insurance cards with you to help speed up the filling of your prescriptions.

**Follow these guidelines to keep yourself safe while taking medication:**

- Follow the directions on the label and on your hospital discharge sheet for administering these medications.
- Do not drive while taking pain medication.
- Do not take pain medication on an empty stomach. This may make you nauseated.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medication.
- Use a stool softener or gentle laxative (you will receive a prescription at discharge), as constipation is common with some pain medications.
- Take your medicine exactly as your doctor prescribes.
- Do not take other medication without telling your doctor.
- Keep a current list of your medicines, dosages, and times to be taken in your wallet or purse

### **How do I keep track of my medications after surgery?**

Before leaving the hospital you will receive a complete list of the medications you will take at home. Your medication list will include the following information:

- Medication name(s)
- Dose of the medication
- Number of times to take the medication each day
- The last time you took each medication
- The next time that you should take each medication

### **How do I care for my JP drain at home?**

Your inpatient nurse will carefully review instructions with you on how to care for your drain at home before you are discharged from the hospital.

- Empty your drain every three hours or as needed.
- After your drain is pulled, your doctor will place a Vaseline® (petrolatum) gauze dressing over the drain site. This can be removed in 24 hours.
- You can shower 24 hours after your drain comes out.

You will receive a drain care sheet from your nurse. You will use this sheet to record the time and amount of drainage you have. Your drains will not be pulled without this information.

### **How do I take care of my incisions?**

- For the first 4 weeks after surgery, please keep your incisions and drain site clean by washing with mild soap and water (basic Dial®, Dove®, etc.; no perfumes, dyes).
- **Avoid** tub baths, swimming pools and hot tubs for the first month after surgery.

- Please do not apply any lotions, cleaning agents, antibiotic creams or ointments on your incision. Following your 4-week post-operative appointment, you may begin to use a scar-reducing product (Vitamin E Oil, Cocoa Butter, Mederma®) to reduce the scars' appearance.
- The strips covering your incisions (steri-strips) are designed to fall off on their own. If they are still on 7-10 days after your drain is pulled, you may take them off yourself.
- Cover your incisions when you are out in the sun.
- Pain, numbness, tingling, color changes, and swelling at your incision site may still exist after surgery and may be normal for weeks or months after your surgery.

### **What lifestyle changes do I need to make after surgery?**

**Stop smoking!** Smoking increases your chance of surgical complications, delays healing, and increases the chance of you having a poor surgical outcome.

### **What are my activity instructions?**

- If at all possible, have someone with you to help you at all times for the first month after surgery.
- Listen to your body and rest when you are tired.
- Do not lift anything greater than 5 pounds for the first month after surgery. As a reference, a gallon of milk weighs about 8 pounds.
- Limit repetitive and overhead use of your surgical arm. You may use the arm but **try not to overuse** the arm. You will not have a sling.
- **Do not** return to work until you have seen your doctor at the first follow up clinic visit. Your return to work depends on your occupation.
- You may drive only when all 3 points are true:
  - you are **no longer** taking sedating medications (medications that make you sleepy or drowsy)

- you can reach your arms outwards without significant fatigue
- you have regained full range of motion of your neck
- Do your Physical Therapy (PT) stretches a maximum of 2-3 times per day for the first month after surgery. Outpatient physical therapy will resume following your 1-month post-operative appointment.
- Walk every day (find an indoor setting during bad weather).
- Use your incentive spirometer 10 times per hour every hour you are awake for the first week following hospital discharge.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Chandu Vemuri, MD FACS  
Reviewers: Susan Young, BSN, RN, Bethany Lee-Lehner, MSN, RN  
CVC Control #1001

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 6/2017