

Full Thickness Skin Graft Post-Operative Instructions

Preparing for your surgery

Items to get before your procedure:

You can buy these from a store or pharmacy.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vaseline® | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton swabs (Q-tips®) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-adherent (non-stick) gauze pads | <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrogen peroxide (3% solution) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bandage tape | |

What to do before surgery:

- Stop smoking cigarettes at least 6 weeks before surgery.
- Stop chewing tobacco at least 4 weeks before surgery.
- Don't drink any alcohol 24 hours before surgery.

What is a skin graft?

A **skin graft** is when a doctor takes healthy skin from a different location on your body (called the **donor site**) to replace skin tissue that was lost from another surgery or injury. The skin graft will connect to blood vessels at the new site (called a new **blood supply**) over the next 1-2 weeks. It's important that the skin graft is not bumped or moved during this time. This makes sure that the skin tissue will connect to this new blood supply, so that the skin will survive in its new site for the rest of your life.

What does the skin graft site look like right after surgery?

The doctor will put a yellow gauze dressing or an aquaplast (a hard plastic material) over your skin graft. **Sutures** (medical stitches) or staples will hold it

in place. Sometimes, a smaller skin graft will be sutured into place without any yellow gauze or aquaplast.

What does the skin graft site look like after a week?

The skin graft will probably be pale or pink, and crusted around the edges. Sometimes a thicker **scab** (a protective crust on a healing wound) may form. Do not remove the scab, since it may be connected to the skin graft and removing it may pull the skin graft away from the site. The skin graft will continue to get lighter in color and become flesh-colored in 1-2 months.

What are my instructions after surgery?

General care instructions

- Have someone drive you home after surgery and help you at home for 1-2 days.
- Keep your head up higher than the rest of your body for the first 2 nights of sleep after surgery. Sleep with your head on 2-3 pillows or in a recliner chair.
- Get lots of rest.
- Start walking as soon as possible after your surgery. This helps to reduce swelling, lowers the chance of blood clots or pneumonia, and helps prevent **constipation** (not being able to have a bowel movement, or having hard, dry poop).
 - If you are resting and moving around less after surgery, this can sometimes lead to constipation. To help with this, you may want to eat more raw fruit and be sure to drink more fluids.
- Take your pain medication as your doctor prescribed.
 - Do not drink alcohol when taking pain medications. Even if you're not taking pain medications, don't drink alcohol for 3 weeks after surgery, as it can cause a buildup of fluid and swelling in your body (**fluid retention**).

- Do not drive until you are no longer taking any prescribed pain medications (like narcotics or opioids).
- If you were taking vitamins or supplements before surgery, start taking them again as long as they don't cause uncomfortable symptoms (like nausea).
- Do not smoke. Smoking slows down healing and increases your risk that the skin graft won't work (as well as other complications).
- You can return to work in 2-7 days. If your employer has specific forms for you and the doctor to fill out, please bring them to the surgery clinic as soon as possible.

How do I take care of my skin graft site?

During the first **24 hours** after surgery:

- Do not get the area wet.
- If there is a white dressing over the skin graft site, you can take this off 24 hours after you get home from surgery.
- Leave the yellow gauze dressing or the aquaplast over the skin graft in place.
 - If you have a yellow gauze dressing, put Vaseline® on the gauze 3 different times during the first 24 hours.
 - If you don't have a yellow gauze dressing or an aquaplast, you can put Vaseline® directly on the skin graft site.
- Keep the skin and sutures dry for 24 hours after surgery, unless the doctor tells you something different.

During the **first week** after surgery:

- Leave the yellow gauze dressing or aquaplast on the skin graft site. If you have a yellow gauze dressing, put Vaseline® on the gauze 3 times a day. Continue doing this every day until your first follow-up appointment after your surgery.

- You may shower 24 hours after surgery. Do not get the skin graft site wet.
 - If you have a yellow gauze dressing, you should put Vaseline® on right before you shower. This will protect the area from getting wet.
 - If you don't have any dressing, you can put Vaseline® directly on the skin graft site to protect the area from getting wet.
 - If the skin graft is on your face, do not put your face directly in the shower water. Instead, wash your face with a wash cloth. You can also ask someone help you wash your hair to make sure that the skin graft site stays dry.
- If you have a yellow gauze dressing or an aquaplast over your skin graft site, a doctor or clinic staff member will remove it 5-10 days after surgery.
- If there is bleeding or crusting around the skin graft, gently clean it with cotton swabs soaked in hydrogen peroxide. Do not remove any scabs.
 - A small amount of blood on the dressing is normal, both at the donor site and around the gauze dressing covering the skin graft. If you have bleeding that continues, keep the dressing on and put pressure on the area for 10 minutes while you sit and relax.
- Do not put ice on the skin graft site.
- While you're at home, leave the yellow gauze dressing or aquaplast open to the air and do not cover it. If you want, you can put a non-stick bandage over your dressing at night or if you go out.

1-2 weeks after surgery:

- Put Vaseline® on the skin graft site 3 times a day for 2 weeks after surgery.
- Keep the skin graft dry for two weeks after your surgery.
- Do not put ice on the skin graft site.

- Avoid soaking or extreme heat (in bathtub, pools, hot tubs, sauna) in the area of the skin graft while your sutures are in place.
- Avoid activities that increase your blood pressure (like bending at the waist, lifting more than 10 pounds) for 7 days. You can start exercising and playing sports 14 days after surgery.

3 weeks after surgery:

- After 3 weeks, you may use make-up, sunblock, and lotions on the skin graft site. Do not use any essential oils until 3 weeks after your surgery.
- After 3 weeks, you can start shaving over the skin graft area.
- You can start swimming 3 weeks after surgery.

4-6 weeks after surgery:

- After 4-6 weeks, you can massage the skin graft and use scar cream on the area.

6-12 months after surgery:

- Keep your scars out of the sun for at least 6-12 months if you can. Always use a strong sunblock (SPF 50 or more) if you can't avoid the sun.

How do I take care of the donor site?

24 hours after surgery, take the white bandage off the donor site.

- If your skin was taped, apply Detachol® (a tape remover) on the tape that is on your skin. Let it soak for 1-2 minutes, and then peel the tape off like a Band-Aid®.

Usually, the doctor will have glued the area together. Do not pick or take off the skin glue. Clean the donor site with soap and water once a day for 3 weeks. It's okay if you get the donor site wet when you shower.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Increased swelling or bruising
- Swelling and redness that lasts for a few days
- Increased redness along the places where the skin was cut
- Severe or increased pain that is not helped by medication
- Side effects to medications including rash, nausea, headache, vomiting, or diarrhea
- An oral (mouth) temperature over 101°F
- Any yellowish or greenish liquid coming from the skin graft or donor site
- A bad smell from the skin graft or donor site
- Bleeding from the places where the skin was cut that you can't control with light pressure.
 - In the event of life-threatening bleeding, you should call 911 or go to the Emergency Department.
- Loss of feeling or motion

Who should I call if I have questions?

On Monday - Friday, 9:00am - 5:00pm:

- If you are a patient of Dr. Brenner, Dr. Joseph or Dr. Moyer, call (734) 432-7634 press option #1 ask for the facial plastic team nurse.
- If you are a patient of Dr. Stucken, call (734) 998-608 and ask for the team 5 nurse.
- If you are a patient of Dr. Kim, or Dr. Rudy, call (734) 615-8838 and ask for the team 4 nurse.

After hours or on weekends:

- Call Hospital Paging at (734) 936-6267 and ask for the ENT doctor on call.

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