

Care Instructions After Surgery for Zenker's Diverticulum

What is Zenker's diverticulum?

Zenker's diverticulum develops when the muscle between the throat and esophagus, known as the **cricopharyngeus muscle**, tightens too much. This causes the section of the throat above it to form a pouch. Over time, the pouch can get bigger as the muscles below it tighten too much. Food can get caught in this pouch, which may cause choking, a choking feeling, or the need to cough up food back into the mouth.

How is Zenker's diverticulum treated?

Patients with Zenker's diverticulum may have surgery to treat their condition. During this surgery, a surgeon will cut into the cricopharyngeus muscle to get rid of the pouch.

What should I expect after my surgery?

- It's common to have a sore throat after surgery. This may last for 1-2 weeks.
- You may get sores in your mouth or have swelling in your lips. These issues should go away within 1 week.
- You may experience some nausea and vomiting, which should improve throughout the day of your surgery and the first day after.
- You may also have a low fever (less than 101° Fahrenheit).

What should I eat and drink after my surgery?

- It's important to drink plenty of liquids after your surgery. Start with ice chips, sips of water, or your favorite fruit juice drink. Then move to

drinking at least an 8 ounce (oz) glass of liquid every hour until you're able to manage eating solid food. **If swallowing liquids causes chest pain or shortness of breath, please contact your doctor immediately.**

- Cold liquids, non-acidic juices, sherbet ice cream, and popsicles are best within the first 24 hours after surgery. Slowly move to eating soft foods. We recommend soft foods such as Jell-O®, custard, soft-boiled or scrambled eggs, pudding, and mashed potatoes. Be sure to drink lots of fluids to keep your throat moist.

Are there foods and drinks I should avoid after surgery?

Avoid the following:

- Acidic foods (like tomato-based foods and sauces)
- Acidic juices, such as orange or tomato juice
- Salty and fried foods, including:
 - Potato chips
 - French fries
 - Popcorn
- Hard toast

How will I manage my pain after surgery?

We will prescribe you pain medications, antibiotics, and possibly medication for nausea. Take your pain medication as prescribed every 4-6 hours as needed. Eating will be easier 30 minutes after taking your pain medication.

- **Do not take aspirin or aspirin products for pain relief, as this may increase your risk of bleeding.**

What activities can I do after surgery?

Rest at home with limited physical activity for the first 24-48 hours after surgery. Avoid heavy lifting, straining, or strenuous activity (activities that

cause you to breathe hard) during this time. You can return to your normal activities once your doctor says it's okay.

When should I call my doctor?

Please call your doctor immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Chest pain or heart palpitations (pounding or racing heart beats, or feeling like your heart skipped a beat)
- Difficulty breathing
- You can't swallow
- Dizziness when you try to stand
- Vomiting that doesn't stop
- Fever greater than 101° Fahrenheit
- Lower neck pain that gets worse over time
- Swelling in the neck

Who should I call if I have questions?

If you have questions or concerns after your surgery, please call the Otolaryngology Clinic nurses at (734) 936-8027 Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM. Please hold non-urgent questions for the next business day.

- If you have urgent questions or concerns on weekends, holidays, or after business hours, please call (734) 936-6267 and ask the operator to page the Otolaryngology resident on call.

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