

How to Prepare for Burn Surgery

This handout will describe what you can expect before, during, and after burn surgery.

Before Surgery

- You may be asked to visit your primary care provider. This is to make sure that you are ready for surgery. You will likely need lab work, heart tests (EKG), and a review of your current medicines.
- You might be told not to take certain medicines. This is because some should not be taken with those given for surgery. Ask which ones to keep taking and which ones to stop taking and when.

Day Before Surgery

- Your Burn team may let you know at your clinic visit that you need surgery. Surgery may happen as soon as the next day.
- Before most surgeries, a nurse will call you. The nurse will ask you a number of questions and let you know when to arrive at the hospital. You will also learn when to stop eating/drinking before surgery.
- Questions to expect:
 - Have you had recent changes to your health (cold, fever, or flu-like symptoms)?
 - Do you have your own equipment and/or devices (inhalers, CPAP/BiPAP machine, etc.)? If so, bring them with you.
- Drink plenty of fluids the day/evening before surgery. This means about 8 glasses of water.

- **No food or drink after midnight.** That includes NO gum, candy, mints or tums.
- No alcohol after 8 pm the night before surgery.
- Remove and leave all jewelry and body piercings at home.
- If you need to bring a purse/wallet and any electronic devices (cell phone, tablet, etc.), give them to a trusted family/friend. If this is not an option, staff can contact staff security to have your items stored in a safe.
- Provide a copy of an advance directive before surgery. If you need help to complete one, please contact the clinic.

What to Pack

Just in case you need to stay overnight in the hospital, plan to bring a few things with you.

- An extra set of loose, comfortable clothing
- Tennis shoes
- Toothbrush

Keep these items in the car. Ask family to bring them to you only if needed. There is very little space to store items brought from home.

Day of Surgery

- **Before:**
 - You will start in First Day Surgery. You will change into a hospital gown and have an IV placed. You will be asked a number of questions to be sure you are ready for surgery.
 - One family member can stay with you in the First Day Surgery

area. Other family members will be asked to wait in the waiting room.

- Refer to the General Surgery Packet/First Day Surgery folder for more details to help you prepare for the day of surgery.
- **During:**
 - Family will get updates on how you are doing during your surgery.
- **After:**
 - You will wake up from anesthesia in the recovery room. Family cannot be in the recovery room. Staff will let them know when you are ready for visitors.
 - You may need to stay in the hospital after surgery. This depends on how surgery went, how you recover from anesthesia, and how you are coping with pain.
 - If you do not stay in the hospital, you need someone age 16 or older to drive you home. That person should stay with you for the next 24 hours. They need to monitor your safety because of the effects of anesthesia. Be ready to give this person's name and phone number the morning of surgery.
 - You may feel a little sleepy for the next 12 to 24 hours. This is due to the medicines you receive during and after surgery.
 - Rest and relax for the next 12 hours. Avoid hazardous or strenuous activity.
 - You may have a sore throat for the next 24 hours if you had a breathing tube. Call if the sore throat is severe or doesn't go away.

Restrictions 24 Hours After Surgery

Even if you feel normal, there are many things you should not do.

- Don't drive a car, motorcycle, or bike.
- Don't operate machinery or power tools.
- Don't drink alcohol or use unapproved drugs.
- Don't make any important personal or business decisions.
- Don't sign important papers.
- Follow your doctor's advice about activity.
- Be careful when you sit or stand up after being in bed for a long time. You may become dizzy if you sit or stand too quickly.

If Admitted to the Hospital

- It is best to eat/drink foods that are high in protein and calories. A dietitian will meet with you to discuss options.
- Nurses will help you manage your pain.
- Your dressing(s) will be taken care of by the team of nurses and doctors. All of the dressings will stay on until 3 days after surgery. On Day 3, the dressings over your graft and donor site will be removed. The sites will be checked and then wrapped with a new dressing. The team will manage your pain during this process.
- A splint may be placed on the area of your surgery. This splint is to be worn at all times for at least the first 3-6 days after surgery. The splint makes it harder to move that area, but allows for better success with the graft.
- You may be on bedrest. This depends on where on your body you need a graft. Bedrest means not getting out of bed for about six days

after surgery. This means not even getting up to go to the bathroom. (A bedpan and/or urinal will be offered instead.) The reason for this is to allow the graft to heal as well as possible.

- To prevent infection, you will be bathed with special soaps. Do not bring your own soap. Please discuss with your hospital team if you have questions.
- As you recover, nurses will teach you and a family member/friend how to take care of your wounds at home. Please think about who this person will be before surgery. Talk about it with that person. They will need to visit you in the hospital 1-3 times to learn wound care.
- When ready to go home, someone will need to drive you home. Decide who this will be before surgery and talk about it with him/her.

Day After Surgery

- Pain: keep up with your schedule for taking pain medicine. Do not drive while taking narcotic pain pills.
- Constipation: Pain pills and being less active can lead to constipation. Eat foods that are high in fiber (bran, oats, fresh fruits and vegetables) and drink a lot of fluids.
- Nausea/vomiting: This can happen as a side effect from anesthesia and/or pain medicine. If you vomit more than twice after getting settled at home, call.

When to Call the Clinic After Surgery

- You have a fever: If the reading is above 100.5 F or 38.1° C for two readings, call the doctor.
- You have numbness, tingling or change in color (turns blue) to the extremity that had surgery.
- More pain and/or swelling of the affected extremity that does not go away after raising it up on two pillows.
- Drainage that is different from what was taught. Be ready to describe what the drainage:
 - looks like (color, thick or thin),
 - how it smells, and
 - how much there is.
- Your dressings are no longer in place, wet, dirty, etc.

Follow-up Care After Surgery

- A clinic visit will be made for you in the burn/wound clinic. Your dressings will be removed in the clinic. The date you return to clinic depends on whether you stayed in the hospital after surgery or not.
- Please take pain medicine one hour before your clinic visit. This will give you the best pain control with the dressing change.

Who to Call with Questions

Burn/Wound Clinic: (608)264-8040

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©11/2017 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8016