

Craniotomy

A craniotomy is when the neurosurgeon opens the skull to fix, take out or put something in. Common reasons include:

- Aneurism
- Brain tumor
- VP shunt

What to Expect in the Hospital

After surgery you will be in the recovery room one to two hours until fully awake. We will then take you to your patient room. Your stay will be about 2 days.

Nurses and doctors will check your arm and leg strength, pupil size, and see how alert you are. They will keep track of your fluid intake and output. You will have an IV in an arm vein until you can take enough fluid by mouth. You will also have leg wraps to prevent clots forming in the legs.

Pain

You may feel more head pressure or have a headache. We will order you pain medicine if this occurs.

Activity

We will ask you to get out of bed the same day or the day after. We will have you slowly increase your activity so you can walk the halls before discharge. Walking is the best exercise.

Diet

We will start you on clear liquids first. You will return slowly to a normal diet.

Going Home

Activity

Walk often. Take short frequent walks. Someone should walk with you. You may simply walk laps around a kitchen table, or up and down a hallway in your home. Slowly increase the distance as you are able. You should get up and move often.

Household Chores and Hobbies

It is better to take frequent short walks than to spend your energy on household chores. After going home, friends and family will need to help with household chores. Slowly increase the amount you do over time. Be aware of safety risks caused by being over tired, healing from surgery, and memory problems.

Until your follow-up visit:

- Avoid heavy lifting.
- No sports, running, etc.
- Do not use heavy or high-speed machinery.
- No ladder or high places.
- No swimming or tub baths.

Driving and Travel

Do not drive until your doctor says it is okay. Avoid flying for 2 – 4 weeks. Talk to your doctor if you plan on flying within 6 weeks.

Work

You and your doctor will discuss when you can return to work. Most people will need 4-6 weeks to heal. Your healing time may vary based on why you had surgery, how you are feeling and the type of job you do.

Diet

After you arrive home, eat frequent, small meals. Make sure you eat enough protein. Protein helps wounds heal.

Constipation

Increase your fiber intake. Drink plenty of fluids, unless your doctor tells you not to. Walk and be as active as you can under your doctor's orders. If needed, you may use a stool softener, laxative, or Fleets® enema which can be bought over-the-counter.

Incision Care

Please follow the instructions in your discharge packet for incision care. Look at your incision daily. Keep it clean and dry. **Do not rub the incision. Pat dry.** Do not apply creams. Call your doctor if you notice any signs of infection. These could include:

- Increased redness, swelling.
- Drainage.
- Increase in pain.
- Fever greater than 100°F

Use a mild shampoo such as baby shampoo once you can get the incision wet. Avoid conditioner, dandruff shampoo, or any combined shampoo/conditioner products until your doctor says it is okay. These products can slow healing.

After your sutures are removed, you should still avoid dandruff shampoo and conditioners for 3 months. Avoid perms and hair dyes for 3 months. Protect the area from sun and cold.

If you can't shower, you need to clean the incision daily with mild soap and water. It should have no, or very little scabbing.

Some incisions have sutures that will dissolve on their own in about 2 weeks. These may look like a clear fishing line.

You may have numbness, itching, and scabs at the incision site. This is normal. It may take many months for the numbness to go away.

Pain

As your pain improves, you will need to decrease the number of medicines you take. If you still have severe or more headaches, call the Neurosurgery clinic.

When to Call

- Severe or more headaches.
- Changes in your vision.
- Nausea or vomiting isn't going away.
- Become more tired.
- Change in behavior.
- Problems with walking or balance.
- Any drainage from your incision or signs of infection.

Who to Call

Neurosurgery Clinic,
Monday–Friday 8 am-5 pm:
(608) 915-0900

After hours, this number will reach the paging operator.

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 © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4452.