

# Discharge Instructions

## Sternotomy

### Activity

- ◆ Ambulate 30 minutes daily may be broken up into 3 ten minute intervals, gradually increasing.
- ◆ No twisting, bending, straining or strenuous activity for 10 weeks after your surgery. Do **NOT** lift anything over 5 pounds (a half gallon of milk) Examples of activities to avoid: swinging a golf club, vacuuming, and gardening).
- ◆ Do not drive for 4 weeks after surgery or while taking prescription pain medications. You may ride in a car.
- ◆ Avoid sitting or standing for long periods. Get up and move around every 2 hours. When sitting in a chair pump your calves, or make circles with your toes. When sitting in a chair elevate your legs above the level of your heart.
- ◆ You will take home an incentive spirometry device from the hospital. Keep it near you at home and use it 5-6 times per day for the first 2 weeks after surgery.
- ◆ If you smoke, please quit. Smoking increases your risk of developing heart disease, carotid artery disease, lung cancer, and worsens peripheral artery disease. It can also delay wound healing.

### Diet/Eating

- ◆ For most people a low saturated fat and cholesterol diet which is high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is a good healthy diet unless you are otherwise directed by your physician.
- ◆ You may want to eat 5-6 small meals a day instead of 3 larger ones. Do not be surprised if you have a decreased appetite or food has no taste for a few weeks after surgery. Your ability to taste will return and your appetite will generally increase as your activity increases. If your appetite is reduced and you are not getting enough calories a day, you can try some Ensure which can be bought at most grocery stores. (If you are diabetic, Glucerna instead of Ensure should be used).
- ◆ You will likely experience gas pains after your surgery. Walking and increasing your activity is the most effective way you can help relieve this discomfort. If constipation occurs refer to the medication section for instructions.

### Incision

- ◆ Shower daily. Do **NOT** take a tub bath, use a whirlpool or swim until the incision is completely healed. For most people this will be at least 4 weeks after the surgery.
- ◆ Keep the incision clean and dry. It can be gently washed with soap and water. Do **NOT** scrub the incision. Pat dry with a clean towel. Dry the incision first then the rest of your body. Use a clean towel daily.
- ◆ Your incision will take several months to heal completely. It will feel raised and thickened along the incision line which will slowly decrease over time. It will take several weeks for this to resolve. Do not apply lotions, ointments, creams or bandages on the incision.
- ◆ During the first week you may notice some slight bloody drainage from the incision line. If this happens apply dry gauze to that area using a small amount of tape if needed to secure it.
- ◆ If you have incisions in the groin area, make sure these are kept clean and dry. Use dry gauze in skin folds if needed. Change as often as needed to keep the incisions dry.
- ◆ Coughing or sneezing is difficult after surgery. Keep a pillow close at hand to help splint the chest when needed. Coughing is good and helps clear the lungs of mucus.
- ◆ Your incision will likely have staples. These are generally removed at the first post-operative visit.

## Medications

- ◆ An updated medication list will be given to you before you leave the hospital. New prescriptions will be provided to you and education regarding new medications provided. Please take the time to read this information. It is important for you to have a good understanding of what medications you are taking.

## Call Your Surgeon for Any of These Symptoms @ (478) 742-7566

- ◆ Chest pains
- ◆ Fever above 100.0 degrees F.
- ◆ Signs of infection (redness, swelling, drainage, or warmth) at the incision site.
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Fainting
- ◆ Weight gain of more than 3 pounds in a 24 hour periods or more than 5 pounds in 1 week.
- ◆ New or increased swelling in your hands, feet or ankles.
- ◆ Unrelieved pain at the incision site
- ◆ Changes in the location, type, or severity of pain
- ◆ Fast or irregular pulse
- ◆ Any unusual bleeding

## Reducing your risk

- ◆ It is very important that if you smoke, you quit. Adequate management of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes, along with maintaining a normal weight is encouraged to all of our patients. This is one of the reasons why routine follow-up with your primary care physician is very important to your continued health and well-being.

## Follow-up Appointment

- ◆ A follow-up appointment will be made for you prior to leaving the hospital. It will be 2-3 weeks after your surgery. It is extremely important that you make it to this appointment for evaluation and recommendations for follow-up. Additionally, you need to make an appointment to see your primary care physician within 2 weeks of being discharged from the hospital.

## Returning to Work

- ◆ Returning to work is generally discussed at the follow-up visit. If you have a desk job you may be able to return to work in 10 weeks, as long as you can move around frequently. If you have a job that requires physical labor you may be off work for about 12 weeks.



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