

Skin Graft Post-Op Instructions

Overview:

You have had a skin graft. This is a thin layer of skin taken from a healthy area of your body. Skin grafts are extremely delicate and require special care and gentle activity only in order to heal.

After Surgery:

You should expect to feel a bit of pain for the first two days. After this, your pain should significantly improve.

You'll have dressings on that typically stay in place until follow-up.

The pathology results from your treatment (if applicable) should be available within 4 weeks. If you have not heard your results from your surgeon or your family physician, please contact your surgeon's office.

Some bleeding at the surgical site is normal. If it is bleeding a lot, place pressure on the area with a towel and keep it applied for 15 minutes. If it does not stop, contact your surgeon's office or go to the emergency department.

Scars will be pink for up to 18 months following your surgery. They should be protected from the sun during this time to help improve their cosmetic outcome.

Incision Care:

Bolster Dressing: The graft site will have a pin-cushion dressing or a wrap over it to keep pressure on the graft. This should be left on and kept clean and dry until your follow-up visit.

VAC Dressing: Sometime the graft site has a vacuum dressing on. Leave the dressing in place until your follow-up. Call (250) 370-8000 and ask to speak to the Burn and Wound nurse if you have problems with the VAC.

Donor dressing: The dressing on the donor site should be kept clean and dry. It is normal for it to bleed a little. If the bandage falls off, cover the area with antibiotic ointment and a non-stick dressing. You may want to sleep with a towel under the surgical site for the first few nights in case there is some drainage.

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Activity and Care at Home:

You should maintain a gentle level of activity until instructed by your doctor. In most cases, this will be two weeks or until the surgical site has healed. The area of surgery should be elevated above your heart for as much of the time as possible to minimize swelling.

You should keep the surgical site elevated above the level of your heart. Slings are not needed.

Do not do any activity that hurts or causes pain at your surgery site. A more formal physical therapy program can start after your initial post-operative visit, usually 2 weeks after surgery.

Pain Management:

You will have freezing that lasts 1-8 hours that helps with your pain control. It is important that you not use the limb during this time. When the freezing wears off, you may feel tingling. To manage pain, take Ibuprofen (Advil) and plain Tylenol every 6 hours for the first 48 hours. If that is not sufficient, then take the prescription medication. Do not take more Tylenol or ibuprofen than is recommended on the bottle in 24 hours. You can refer to the pain management handout. Generally, you will have pain for 24-48 hours then it should decrease significantly. A cool gel pack may also help with the swelling.

If the surgery is on your hand you should keep your hand elevated about the level of your heart. Slings are not needed.

IMPORTANT:

The surgery may be performed under general anaesthetic therefore must not operate motor vehicles, boats, power tools or machinery for the first 24 hours.

If you have had surgery under a general anaesthetic or sedation you must not drive or operate other machinery for 24 hours after surgery. Please note that the Motor Vehicle Act of BC 195 (1) prohibits operation of a motor vehicle if "the control of the driver over the driving mechanism of the vehicle... is obstructed." Driving with a hand injury, leg injury or cast in place that impairs your ability to hold the steering wheel is therefore in violation of the Act. You may resume driving once you have return of function to your operated limb and no longer require narcotic pain medication.

If you experience increasing rather than decreasing pain, bleeding not controlled with pressure, excessive swelling or bruising, increased swelling or redness around the wound, increased drainage from incisions or in your drains, foul odour, fever, chills, please call your surgeon's office. If you experience shortness of breath, or arm or leg pain, call 9-1-1 or visit your emergency department.