Vulvectomy
Care After Surgery

The vulva is the external female genitalia, outside and around the vagina and pubic bone. It consists of:
- The skin on, and in front of, the pubic bone.
- The clitoris.
- The labia majora (*large lips*) on the outside of the vagina.
- The labia minora (*small lips*) around the opening of the vagina.
- The opening and the skin in and around the vagina.

A vulvectomy is the removal of the tissue of the vulva, which sometimes includes removal of the lymph nodes and tissue in the groin areas.

These discharge instructions provide you with general information on caring for yourself after you leave the hospital. It is also important that you know the warning signs of complications, so that you can seek treatment. Please read the instructions outlined below and refer to this sheet in the next few weeks. Your caregiver may also give you specific information and medicines. If you have any questions or complications after discharge, please call your caregiver.

ACTIVITY
- Rest as much as possible the first two weeks after discharge.
- Arrange to have help from family or others with your daily activities when you go home.
- Avoid heavy lifting (more than 5 pounds), pushing, or pulling.
- If you feel tired, balance your activity with rest periods.
- Follow your caregiver's instruction about climbing stairs and driving a car.
- Increase activity gradually.
- Do not exercise until you have permission from your caregiver.

LEG AND FOOT CARE
If your doctor has removed lymph nodes from your groin area, there may be an increase in swelling of your legs and feet. You can help prevent swelling by doing the following:
- Elevate your legs while sitting or lying down.
- If your caregiver has ordered special stockings, wear them according to instructions.
- Avoid standing in one place for long periods of time.
- Call the physical therapy department if you have any questions about swelling or treatment for swelling.
- Avoid salt in your diet. It can cause fluid retention and swelling.
- Do not cross your legs, especially when sitting.

NUTRITION
- You may resume your normal diet.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids a day.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet including portions of food from the meat (*protein*), milk, fruit, vegetable, and bread groups.
- Your caregiver may recommend you take a multivitamin with iron.

ELIMINATION
- You may notice that your stream of urine is at a different angle, and may tend to spray. Using a plastic funnel may help to decrease urine spray.
- If constipation occurs, drink more liquids, and add more fruits, vegetables, and bran to your diet. You may take a mild laxative, such as Milk of Magnesia™, Metamucil™ or a stool softener, such as Colace™ with permission from your caregiver.

HYGIENE

- You may shower and wash your hair.
- Check with your caregiver about tub baths.
- Do not add any bath oils or chemicals to your bath water, after you have permission to take baths.
- Clean yourself well after moving your bowels.
- After urinating, wipe from top to bottom.
- A sitz bath will help keep your perineal area clean, reduce swelling, and provide comfort.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS:

- Take your temperature twice a day and record it, especially if you feel feverish or have chills.
- Follow your caregiver's instructions about medicines, activity, and follow-up appointments after surgery.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medicine.
- Change your dressing as advised by your caregiver.
- You may take over-the-counter medicine for pain, recommended by your caregiver.
- If your pain is not relieved with medicine, call your caregiver.
- Do not take aspirin, because it can cause bleeding.
- Do not douche or use tampons (use a non-perfumed sanitary pad).
- Do not have sexual intercourse until your caregiver gives you permission. Hugging, kissing, and playful sexual activity is fine with your caregiver's permission.
- Warm sitz baths, with your caregiver's permission, are helpful to control swelling and discomfort.
- Take showers instead of baths, until your caregiver gives you permission to take baths.
- You may take a mild medicine for constipation, recommended by your caregiver. Bran foods and drinking a lot of fluids will help with constipation.
- Make sure your family understands everything about your operation and recovery.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You notice swelling and redness around the wound area.
- You notice a foul smell coming from the wound or on the surgical dressing.
- You notice the wound is separating.
- You have painful or bloody urination.
- You develop nausea and vomiting.
- You develop diarrhea.
- You develop a rash.
- You have a reaction or allergy from the medicine.
- You feel dizzy or light headed.
- You need stronger pain medicine.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a temperature of 100°F (38.9°C) or higher.
- You pass out.
- You develop leg or chest pain.
- You develop abdominal pain.
- You develop shortness of breath.
- You develop bleeding from the wound area.
- You see pus in the wound area.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 08/10/2005 Document Re-Released: 12/06/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.