Craniotomy, Care After Surgery

Please read the instructions outlined below and refer to this sheet in the next few weeks. These discharge instructions provide you with general information on caring for yourself after you leave the hospital. Your surgeon may also give you specific instructions. While your treatment has been planned according to the most current medical practices available, unavoidable complications occasionally occur. If you have any problems or questions after discharge, please call your surgeon.

Although there are many types of brain surgery, recovery following craniotomy (*surgical opening of the skull*) is much the same for each. However, recovery depends on many factors. These include the type and severity of brain injury and the type of surgery. It also depends on any nervous system function problems (*neurological deficits*) before surgery. If the craniotomy was done for cancer, chemotherapy and radiation could follow. You could be in the hospital from 5 days to a couple weeks. This depends on the type of surgery, findings, and whether there are complications.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Sleep and rest with your head at a 30 degree angle of elevation. This helps keep brain swelling down and prevents increased pressure in the head. This is important immediately after surgery. Ask your surgeon when you can go back to sleeping flat. Most likely, this will depend on your symptoms, such as headaches.
- Change dressings as directed. Typically, your surgeon will change the dressing for you, and will give you instructions on what to do if the dressing falls off.
- Your scalp may feel spongy for a while, because of fluid under it. This will gradually get better. Occasionally, the surgeon will not replace the bone that was removed to access the brain. If there is a bony defect, the surgeon will ask you to wear a helmet for protection. This is a discussion you should have with your surgeon prior to leaving the hospital (*discharge*).
- Numbness may persist in some areas of your scalp.
- Take all medications as directed. Sometimes steroids to control swelling are prescribed. Anticonvulsants to prevent seizures may also be given. Do not use alcohol, other drugs, or medications unless your surgeon says it is OK.
- Keep the wound dry and clean. The wound may be washed gently with soap and water. Then, you may gently blot or dab it dry, without rubbing. Do not take baths, use swimming pools or hot tubs for 10 days, or as instructed by your caregiver. It is best to wait to see you surgeon at your first postoperative visit, and to get directions at that time.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- You may continue your normal diet, as directed.
- Walking is OK for exercise. Wait at least 3 months before you return to mild, non-contact sports or as your surgeon suggests. Contact sports should be avoided for at least 1 year, unless your surgeon says it is OK.
- If you are prescribed steroids, take them exactly as prescribed. If you start having a decrease in nervous system functions (*neurological deficits*) and headaches as the dose of steroids is reduced, tell your surgeon right away.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop nausea, vomiting, severe headaches, confusion, or you have a seizure.
- You develop chest pain, a stiff neck, or difficulty breathing.
- There is redness, swelling, or increasing pain in the wound or pin insertion sites.
- You have an increase in swelling or bruising around the eyes.
- There is drainage or pus coming from a wound, lasting longer than 1 day.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- You notice a foul smell coming from the wound or dressing.

- The wound breaks open (*edges not staying together*) after the stitches have been removed.
- You develop dizziness or fainting while standing.
- You develop a rash.
- You develop any reaction or side effects to the medications given.

Document Released: 03/26/2009 Document Re-Released: 01/09/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.