

## Patient information factsheet

# Head and neck surgery including graft and flap repairs

This factsheet aims to answer any questions you may have after your skin surgery. If you would like any further information or have any concerns, please contact us on the number at the end of this factsheet.

### Local anaesthetic

The local anaesthetic will usually wear off in about one to three hours.

### Pain

If you are in pain, we recommend that you take paracetamol (two tablets of 500mgs), which can be repeated after four to six hours (maximum of eight tablets in any 24-hour period).

### Dressings and stitches

- Keep your dressing in place and dry for two days. After two days, you may shower as normal. Remove the wet dressing and pat the area dry.
- Apply a thin smear of petroleum jelly directly over the stitches morning and evening. Only reapply a plaster if you would like to. Please use a new pot of petroleum jelly.
- Repeat this process daily until the stitches are removed.

or

- Keep your dressing in place and dry for \_\_\_\_\_.

We may ask you to wear a bandage after your surgery. This will need to remain in place until \_\_\_\_\_.

### Can I keep the original dressing on for more than 48 hours?

Yes, as long as the dressing remains clean and dry.

### Bleeding

It is important that you do not exert yourself and avoid leaning forwards or doing any strenuous activity for the first 24 to 48 hours, as this may increase the risk of bleeding.

If you start to bleed or notice blood on the dressing, do not panic. Slight oozing or spotting of blood on the dressing is normal. However, if the bleeding persists, apply firm, continual pressure to the area for 15 minutes (usually this will stop most bleeding). An icepack wrapped in a tea towel (frozen peas are ideal) pressed firmly against the wound can also be helpful.

## **What should I do if I cannot stop the bleeding?**

Between the hours of 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday (Thursdays, 8am to 2pm), please call our dermatology department on **023 8120 2871**.

Outside of these hours, please go to the walk-in urgent treatment centre at Royal South Hants Hospital (opening hours: 7.30am to 10pm). Alternatively, please contact Southampton General Hospital's switchboard on **023 8077 7222** and ask for the on-call dermatologist who will be available until 8pm. After 8pm, please go to the emergency department at Southampton General Hospital for assistance.

## **What should I do if I take medication such as aspirin, warfarin or clopidogrel, which are blood thinners?**

You are slightly at a higher risk of bleeding. However, you should **not** stop taking your medication unless advised to do so by a member of your healthcare team.

## **Swelling and bruising**

You may experience some swelling and bruising. This should improve within a week, but it can sometimes take slightly longer.

## **What should I do if the swelling doesn't improve?**

Please contact your GP or our dermatology department for advice if you are concerned.

## **Infection**

We take every precaution to prevent a wound infection before, during and after your surgery. Despite this, some wounds will still become infected. Symptoms of a wound infection include: increase in redness, increase in pain, increase in swelling, discharge and smell. You may also experience fever or feel generally unwell.

## **Who should I contact if I think I have an infection?**

Contact our dermatology department or your GP if you have one or more of the above symptoms. You may be prescribed an antibiotic if your wound is infected.

## **Smoking**

Smoking affects the healing process. We advise you to stop or at least reduce your daily amount of cigarettes for the duration of your recovery.

## **Alcohol**

Alcohol can increase the risk of bleeding. We advise you to avoid alcohol for 24 hours after your surgery.

## **Eating and drinking**

It is important to rest and eat a good balanced diet after your surgery, as this will aid your general healing and wellbeing.

Hot drinks and hot, spicy, chewy food can increase the risk of bleeding. We advise you to avoid these for at least six hours after your surgery.

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## Scarring

We will make every effort to minimise the scar. However, scars can be unpredictable. You should avoid physical activities that put a strain on the stitches for the first two to three weeks after your surgery. Straining the stitches may lead to your wound opening and this could affect the healing of your wound and how it looks once it has healed.

After your stitches have been removed, massage the scar using petroleum jelly for five minutes twice a day, for about a month. This will help improve the way the scar looks. Some people will develop a slight reaction to the stitches under their skin which will make the scar feel lumpy. This will settle in time.

## Numbness

Numbness in the area of the scar can occur. This will usually improve over time, but it can last up to two years, or in rare cases, longer.

## Removal of stitches

Your healthcare professional will advise which of the following apply:

Please make an appointment with your practice nurse in \_\_\_\_\_ days.

Day: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your stitches will need to be removed in the department in \_\_\_\_\_ days.

Day: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your appointment with your practice nurse as soon as possible as they can become booked up.

## Wound opening before or after stitch removal

Please contact our dermatology department for advice.

## Information for practice or district nurse

- If you suspect an infection, please swab the area before prescribing an antibiotic.
- Please contact our department if there are any concerns on **023 8120 2871**.

Type of stitches used: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of stitches: \_\_\_\_\_

Any additional information for practice or district nurse:

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## Results

We will send a letter with your results to both you and your GP, usually within four to six weeks of your surgery.

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## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Dermatology department

Telephone: **023 8120 2871**, opening hours: Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm (Thursday, 8am to 2pm only)

Email: [dermatologysurgicalbookingteam@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:dermatologysurgicalbookingteam@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Share your experience of our dermatology outpatients service

Your feedback helps us to celebrate what's working well and identify where we need to improve. We would be grateful if you would take a moment to review the service you received while in our care. Please scan the QR code below to complete our short online survey.



Seeking and acting on patient feedback is key to improving the quality of our services. The Friends and Family Test gives you the opportunity to give your view on the care or treatment you've received. You can complete the survey online by visiting: [www.uhs.nhs.uk/PatientsAndVisitors/Patientexperienceandsatisfaction/Friends-and-Family-Test.aspx](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/PatientsAndVisitors/Patientexperienceandsatisfaction/Friends-and-Family-Test.aspx) and entering the password **rhmo** when prompted.

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit [www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)