

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACELIFT SURGERY

The following instructions pertain specifically to facelift surgery.

WHAT TO EXPECT POSTOPERATIVELY:

It is important that you are prepared for your postoperative recovery period after facelift surgery. The day of surgery, for instance, you might feel sleepy from the anesthesia. Most likely, you will have no discomfort due to the long-acting local anesthesia that is used. When this wears off, most patients describe some discomfort, usually around the back of the ears and neck, which is easily alleviated by analgesic pills and cool compresses. Pain requiring more than mild to moderate analgesics in pill form is extremely rare. Your face and neck may feel firm, tight, and look shiny during the swelling period. This too is quite normal and wears off gradually.

DRESSINGS:

A mild to moderate compressive dressing of cotton and soft elastic bandages is placed around the sides of the face and neck for the first night. The next day when you are checked by the nursing staff and Dr. Binder, this is removed. If a midface procedure is performed, a compressive facemask is sometimes used and is also removed the next day. The facemask has been shown to significantly reduce postoperative swelling. After the surgical areas are examined, a looser, more comfortable dressing is reapplied. This remains in place for the next 24 to 48 hours.

DRAINS:

After facelift surgery, we usually insert drains under the skin flaps. These drains are removed in 48 to 72 hours. After any surgical procedure, tissues will always produce a certain amount of fluid as a natural part of the healing process. Any excess accumulation of fluid may result in more bruising and prolonged swelling. ***Therefore, we are strong advocates of using drains - since it is better for this fluid to leave the area than linger.*** Our rule of thumb is: one day's use of a drain saves a week of recovery time.

BLURRINESS OF VISION:

Your vision may be slightly blurry due to swelling and protective ointment used during the surgery. This sometimes lingers for a day or two and can be expected after most extended surgical procedures.

SWELLING AND BRUISING:

Mild bruising and swelling are an important part of the body's normal healing process, and are most apparent around the eyelids, earlobes, and neck. Most of this will rapidly resolve within five to seven days. Not infrequently, the cheeks will have a slight chipmunk appearance. This, too, is short lived, resolving over several days. Notify our office if swelling appears excessive. Depending upon other procedures performed with the facelift surgery, such as chin or cheek implants, those areas will naturally have more prolonged periods of swelling.

ASYMMETRY:

Whenever any surgery is performed on both sides of the body, you should be prepared for some degree of temporary asymmetry. Swelling and bruising naturally occurs and resolves faster on one side of the face than the other. This is due to differences of the blood supply and lymphatic drainage.

WHAT TO DO AFTER SURGERY

PREPARING COOL COMPRESSES:

The use of icy cool compresses to the eye and facial areas not covered with bandages will help to resolve swelling and bruising. Soak and wring out gauze pads and place these over your eyes and face as much as possible while you are awake (i.e. 10 min. on & 5 min. off). ***Ice bags should never be placed directly against the skin, as the area may be numb due to local anesthetic and swelling.*** Frozen peas placed in a plastic bag can also be used very effectively.

HOW TO RECLINE OR SLEEP:

Sleep with your head elevated. The best way is to recline with your head elevated on two or three pillows. This should be done for the first two to three weeks after surgery to prevent swelling.

EATING & DIET:

The night after surgery you should only have clear liquids, such as Seven-Up. The second day, you can have lukewarm soup or broth and follow a relatively soft diet for one week after surgery.

SHOWERS & BATHING:

Following your surgery, showers should not be taken for the first two to three days until your incision line is sealed and bandages are removed. After your incision lines are sealed and the bandages are removed, you may wash your hair and clean any crusts that may develop around the incision sites. Baths or showers should be taken using lukewarm water.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR HAIR:

No hair is shaved around the operative area during facelift surgery. After surgery we recommend using either baby shampoo or a mild shampoo for the first two weeks. For

the first few days, your hair should be towel dried only. You can resume use of a hair dryer after three days, but **make sure you only use a cool setting**, until all feeling returns to the scalp area to prevent burns. Hair can be set loosely two to three weeks after surgery, but do not use tight hair rollers, perm or color your hair for six weeks.

WEARING GLASSES:

Glasses can be worn as long as the stems do not irritate your ears or the incisions around your ears. Protective pads can be purchased and placed around the stems of the glasses to avoid causing any irritation during the initial healing phase.

THINGS TO AVOID TO MINIMIZE SWELLING AND SPEED HEALING:

- (1) **AVOID EXCESSIVE BENDING AND HEAVY LIFTING** for at least 2 weeks to minimize swelling and avoid bleeding.
- (2) **AVOID THE SUN OR EXCESSIVE HEAT:** Do not expose your face to the sun for 4 to 6 weeks. Use a sun screen when in the sun for the next 6 months following surgery. Do not use a **hot hair dryer** for at least 2 weeks after surgery, since the facial skin should be shielded from the direct heat of the dryer. A cool or slightly warm setting is O.K. **Saunas, and extremely hot showers** can also contribute to swelling and should be avoided for 2 to 3 months following your surgery.
- (3) **NO ASPIRIN, NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, NO CAFFEINE** for 2 weeks before and after surgery.
- (4) **"NO SMOKING"** - It can:
 - (a) Have a deleterious (harmful) effect on wound healing.
 - (b) Have a deleterious (injurious) effect on the skin and cause hair loss.
 - (c) Smokers tend to cough more and post operative coughing can increase chances of hematoma. (This will also increase the risk of tissue slough).
 - (d) Smoking will also cause increased incident of pulmonary complications.
 - (e) "Passive Smoke"; others in family or surrounding smoking can similarly adversely affect you.
- (5) **AVOID MIRRORS.** Everyone experiences a temporary surprise when viewing a slightly bruised, swollen "stranger" in the mirror. Remember that a more attractive, youthful "you" will show through in several days.
- (6) **AVOID SUDDEN MOVEMENTS** of the head to either side during the first 2 weeks. When turning, turn your shoulders too, not just your neck. This reduces any tension on the sutures.
- (7) **AVOID EXCESSIVE USE OF THE TELEPHONE** for the first two weeks following surgery. Too much pressure from the telephone receiver on the

tender skin around the ear, during this crucial postoperative period, can cause damage to the skin. If necessary, use a speaker phone, or buy a cushioned ear piece for the receiver.

AVOID EARRINGS AND EAR PIERCING:

Heavy earrings should not be worn after facelifts for 4 to 6 weeks. After facelifts it may be necessary to re-pierce ears. This is done in the office during one of your postoperative visits approximately 2 months after surgery.

MOISTURIZERS AND MAKEUP:

To prevent dryness and itching, facial moisturizers can be used approximately 5 to 7 days after surgery. A good **moisturizer** can be applied to the skin at night. Make-up can be used to camouflage bruising, as long as it does not cover incision lines. Our office staff can suggest several skin care products.

EYE CARE:

If you have had eyelid surgery together with facial surgery, you may experience slight tearing, itchiness or mild irritation during the first few days following surgery. If necessary, we will prescribe ointments or eye drops to help resolve these minor symptoms. Any creams or ointments used around the eyes should be water soluble. If you must use a non-water soluble facial cosmetic or skin care product, be very careful not to get the solution near your eyes.

INCISIONS IN THE MOUTH (IMPLANT SURGERY):

If surgery performed was performed from inside the mouth (such as cheek and mandibular augmentation or buccal lipectomy) add 1/2 teaspoon of salt to a glass of cool water and rinse your mouth several times a day. The stitches will dissolve within two weeks.

PLACEMENT AND REMOVAL OF STITCHES:

The facelift operation uses very fine stitches, that are placed in such a way as to minimize scarring and prevent unnecessary stitch marks from occurring. Stitches are used to support the incision site, while it heals. These stitches are removed in our office, starting on the fifth day and completed in 10 to 14 days. Some sutures are absorbable and dissolve in seven to fourteen days. Deeper stitches are also placed in strategic areas to add strength to the incision line closure and will absorb over a period of one to three months. Lumpiness (more common in some areas than others) may be found along the incision line is temporary, and resolves in time.

SKIN SENSITIVITY TO SUN/WIND/TEMPERATURE:

Initially, your new skin will be sensitive to sun, wind and temperature changes. For the first few weeks following surgery, it is important that you cover up with a hat, sunblock, sunglasses, facial and neck scarf, etc., whenever you go outside, or until the sensitivity resolves.

For three months, your incision line and skin must be totally protected from sun exposure by using a good sunscreen. A good, "complete sunblock" is provided by a zinc oxide paste which also comes in skin color. Most of the over-the-counter sunblocks in the range above #30 will do the job. Some are more hypoallergenic than others. Our staff will assist you in the selection of the ones we recommend and any of the newer products we feel provide substantial improvements.

Always test a new product on a small area of your incision line overnight to ensure that you don't develop a rash or irritation.

Remember, certain medications, such as birth control pills, antibiotics, or high blood pressure pills, will increase your sensitivity to the sun. In these circumstance, it becomes even more important that you protect your skin.

NUMBNESS:

One of the most common complaints postoperatively, is numbness in areas behind the ear; or concurrently with brow lifts, numbness over the scalp. Anytime incisions are made and the skin and soft tissues are elevated over the face, the small nerve fibers supplying these areas are temporarily interrupted. However, these peripheral nerve endings do grow back. Full return of sensation and feeling to areas, such as the back of the ears and neck, will sometimes take up to 6 months.

LUMPS AND BUMPS:

The "modern day" facelift includes extensive tightening and repositioning of the deeper facial muscles and fat layers. Skin swelling is always the first to resolve. However, a few weeks afterwards you may develop slight firmness, lumpiness, or bumpiness. This is due to the deeper muscle swelling, which takes a longer time to resolve than the skin swelling which hides it during the first few weeks. This is quite normal and resolves within the first 4 to 6 weeks. Most lumpiness is treated by massaging it with gentle finger pressure (approximately 10 seconds 6-7 times a day).

A WORD ABOUT MOOD SWINGS:

Mood changes are common during the first several days to weeks, particularly after facelift surgery. Typically, periods of excitement and elation alternate with depression and fatigue. Weakness is a compromising state, especially for "**high-energy**" people that are used to a busy schedule. ***It is quite normal to experience a tired feeling 2 to 3 weeks following surgery.*** On the average, you should allow two weeks recovery time before socializing or working. Most patients report feeling totally 'back to myself' in approximately three weeks.

RESUMPTION OF ACTIVITIES:

Resumption of activities depends, to a great extent, on how you feel and how quickly your swelling resolves. Most patients tell us they feel better than expected following their

surgery and are able to return to work and social activities within 7 to 10 days. However, 2 weeks for recovery is recommended for a complete face and neck lift. It is important not to turn your neck too much, from side to side, during the immediate healing phase. When driving your car, for example, it is advisable to use the rear view mirrors rather than turning your neck. Light exercise can be resumed at 3 weeks. Regular exercise and workouts at the gym can usually start 4 to 5 weeks postoperatively. After starting activity, you might feel a slight "pressure sensation" in and around your face if you "over do it". This is your "cue" to stop and then resume the next day at a slightly lower intensity.

AIR TRAVEL:

Depending on the destination and length of travel, you may travel by air between 7 and 10 days following your surgery. This also depends whether other procedures were also performed with the face lift. You might experience some temporary swelling and a pressure sensation in your face during the flight. This is normal and should not alarm you.

"INCISIONS" AND "SCARS": THE PROCESS OF HEALING

Contrary to popular opinion, forming a "**scar**" is good, since it is the way the body heals itself. To the patient, however, the idea of scarring is unnerving. We minimize scarring by camouflaging the incision sites. Plastic surgical techniques in wound closure are more time-consuming and meticulous, so that scars become inconspicuous.

INCISION LINES HEAL IN FOUR PHASES:

Phase I: Weeks 1 and 2. Initially the wounds are characterized by slight oozing and crusting. Bruising and soreness resolve in 7 to 10 days. Crusting can be softened with antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin or Neosporin). The incision lines will seal rapidly within the first 24 to 36 hours. At this point, some of the softened crusts can be gently washed away with mild soap and water, but avoid picking at them since this will cause unnecessary bleeding and delayed healing.

Phase II: Weeks two through six. As your incision lines heal, new blood vessels and nerves grow in the area and may cause the scars to look pink to light red. On occasion, the application of Hydrocortisone cream -- 1/2% or 1% may be applied to the incision lines to reduce the occurrence of excessive irritation or redness around the incision sites. ***Please do not apply vitamin E oil or cream, or any over the counter ointments during this phase of healing.***

Phase III: Six weeks to six months. During this time, scars become less red ,

flatten and begin to blend into the surrounding skin.

Phase IV: Six months to 24 months. Scars become softer, looser, smoother, and less noticeable. If excess redness, swelling or tenderness persists, an injection of dilute cortisone into the scar will help to reduce this problem.

In those unusual cases where there is a genetic tendency toward hypertrophic scarring, topical and intralesional injections of hydrocortisone as well as other treatments can be instituted earlier and more intensively after surgery.

WHEN IS SURGERY NOT RECOMMENDED?

A facelift is a very safe operation when performed by a competent surgeon in a well-equipped facility. Certain uncontrolled health problems, however, such as high blood pressure, uncontrolled diabetes, or severe heart, lung, kidney, and liver disorders contraindicate elective aesthetic surgery. Also, patients on anticoagulation medication or those with serious psychiatric disorders are not good candidates. Your initial medical screening in our office and a physical examination will ensure that you have no health problems that contraindicate surgery.

COMPLICATIONS

With all surgical procedures, there exists the remote possibility of complications. Complications involving facelift surgery are unusual and rarely permanent. Most situations self-correct in time, resolving with simple treatment, or sometimes further surgery. Although we have an extremely low incidence of complications, the following is a list of the more commonly noted risks published in the surgical literature for your information:

(1) **Hematoma** (blood collection under the skin):

By avoiding aspirin and aspirin-containing products for two weeks before surgery, with normal bleeding and clotting laboratory tests, this complication is very unusual. Occasionally, a small amount of blood or fluid may collect under the skin and can be removed, under local anesthesia, with a small needle. In the case of a large accumulation of blood, immediate drainage would be necessary in order to remove it.

(2) **Poor incision healing, margin skin loss, or thick scars:**

Smoking, skin that is pulled too tight, suture reaction, or local infections can all cause poor wound healing. Although great care is taken to prevent these problems, if one were to occur, treatment would be instituted immediately and continued until healing occurs. Often, healing occurs without residual scarring. In cases where a touch-up or scar revision is necessary, it is performed six to twelve

months later.

(3) Hair thinning or loss:

This can occur if the scalp is excessively thin, from poorly designed incisions, after revision facelift surgery, or if too much tension is placed on the scalp skin. The use of new techniques which reduce tension from being exerted on the skin have eliminated most of these problems. Micrografts can also be used to treat this problem postoperatively.

(4) Infection:

Although quite rare, areas of localized suture reaction or infection can occur. These are treated with warm soaks, peroxide, systemic antibiotics, and topical application of antibiotic ointments over the incision lines.

(5) Nerve injury:

Occasionally, when superficial sensory nerves of the forehead or cheek area are divided or stretched, temporary numbness may develop over the cheeks and scalp. This usually resolves over a few weeks. Permanent numbness is very rare and time usually brings about a full return of sensation. Because motor nerves are located deeper, they are rarely injured. Fortunately, in over 26 years of performing facelift surgery, this complication has never occurred in my practice. If it were to occur, the literature states that most cases of reported weakness are temporary, with function returning within a matter of months.

We believe that the intensive, individualized attention each patient receives before, during and after surgery prevents the overall occurrence of complications.

A NOTE TO MY PATIENTS

There are many details that must be considered before facelift surgery. Varying degrees of skin elasticity, chronic conditions of the skin such as severe acne or excessive sun damage, the type of bone structure or other conditions may limit the amount of improvement able to be obtained. In these situations, one must have realistic goals and expectations about how much the surgery can accomplish and will be completely discussed during your consultation.