

Postoperative Instructions for Ear Surgery

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[] Incision Behind the Ear

Your surgery required an incision behind the ear. A pressure dressing, made up of a soft plastic “cup” over the ear and Velcro-fastened strap has been applied to reduce swelling. The gauze under the “cup” can be changed as often as needed, and the entire dressing can be removed 24 hours after the surgery.

The incision behind the ear is closed with absorbable sutures under the skin, and then adhesive strips on the outer skin edges. There are no sutures that need to be removed.

The incision should be kept dry for 72 hours after the surgery. You may shower and wash your hair after 72 hours, but avoid soaking or scrubbing the area behind the ear.

The adhesive strips will start to fall off after a few showers. Your doctor will peel them off when you see him for follow up.

Additional comments/instructions:

[] Incision in the Ear Canal

Your surgery required an incision in the ear canal. The ear canal has been packed with antibiotic ointment and absorbable packing sponges to help hold the skin and eardrum in place. Keep a piece of dry, clean cotton in the outer part of the ear for the first week. The cotton can be changed as often as is necessary. Some antibiotic ointment and absorbable sponge packing may come out on its own. It is also common for there to be some reddish drainage from the ear canal over the first few weeks. Once the drainage has stopped, the ear can be left open, without using any cotton.

The ear canal must be kept dry until it has had a chance to fully heal. Whenever you wash your hair or shower, you will need to use an earplug to keep water out. The best way to do this right after surgery is to saturate a piece of cotton

with Vaseline, and place it in the outside “bowl” part of the ear. This can be smoothed against the outer ear to create a watertight seal. Dry cotton will tend to wick water into the ear, so be sure it is fully saturated with Vaseline.

Continue to use these dry-ear precautions until specifically instructed to stop by your doctor. It usually takes the ear canal about 2 months to fully heal before water can be allowed back into the ear.

Additional comments/instructions:

Hearing

Because of swelling, fluid, and packing placed in the ear, hearing will often be worse right after the surgery. It often takes about 2 months for enough healing to take place for the hearing to begin to improve.

Often, as healing occurs, there will be intermittent “crackling”, “popping”, or “squeaking” sounds. This is quite common, and goes along with the healing process. The hearing may also fluctuate somewhat as air begins to return to the middle ear.

Activities

- Avoid blowing your nose or “popping” your ears by holding your nose and blowing. This can force air into the middle ear, and disrupt the healing. Wiping the nose or sniffing is fine. Similarly, if you have to sneeze, sneeze with your mouth open to allow the air to escape, and not be forced into the ears.
- Avoid flying till it has been approved by your doctor. The pressure changes in the middle ear might damage the repair made by your surgeon.
- Avoid using CPAP machine until approved by your doctor. Please notify your surgeon if you use CPAP prior to surgery.



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- Avoid any heavy lifting (over 25 pounds) or strenuous exercise for the first two weeks.
- Avoid bending with the head down. If you must bend, bend at the knees, and keep your head up as much as possible.
- You may sleep however you are most comfortable. Keeping the head somewhat elevated while sleeping will help reduce swelling.
- Patients will often have some dizziness or balance problems following ear surgery. You should avoid driving, climbing, or operating hazardous equipment until your balance has stabilized at a safe level.

Medications

[] **Ear drops**—You have been given a prescription for ear drops. Begin using these 5 days after surgery, 2 times per day. Fill the ear canal with the drops, and let them soak into any packing material in the ear canal. Continue to use the drops until instructed by your doctor.

[] **Pain medicine**—You have been given a prescription for pain medicine. Take this as directed for any discomfort. You are also given a stool softer to avoid constipation from the pain medicine.

[] **Antibiotics**—You have been given a course of oral antibiotics. Take this as instructed until they are gone.

Additional medications:

What to Watch for

Call us if you experience any of the following:

- Increasing redness or pain around the incision site.
- The presence of thick or foul-smelling drainage.
- Progressive or severe dizziness
- Paralysis of the face

Follow-up Appointments

If you already do not have an appointment, please call the Ear, Nose & Throat Center at (202) 741-3017 to schedule an appoint for

- [] 7-10 days after surgery
- [] 3 weeks after surgery
- [] _____ after surgery

Contacting Us

If you need to speak with us about scheduling appointments or follow up, please call (202) 741-3250.

If you have medical questions or concerns, please call the Ear, Nose & Throat Center at (202) 741-3250. One of our nursing staff will be at this number from 8am to 5pm Monday through Friday.

For emergencies after hours, please call the George Washington Hospital page operator at (202) 715-4000, and ask for the Ear, Nose & Throat Center resident on call.

Signature

Date



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