

Post-Operative Care for Soft Tissue Grafts

Proper care of the surgical site is important for the healing process and success of your tissue graft procedure. Each person heals differently and responds differently to discomfort, swelling, bleeding, and recovery time.

The following instructions will help speed the healing and make you more comfortable during your recovery period.

Initial Healing:

The first few days after the surgery are the most crucial for ensuring success of the grafting procedure. In the first 24hrs you need to avoid rinsing your mouth vigorously, spitting, drinking through a straw, and brushing the teeth with a tooth brush around the grafted site. You may use a moist Q-tip as shown by our staff to gently swab any soft plaque buildup off of the teeth. The Q-tip can be dipped in warm salt water or alcohol free mouth wash. You will need to avoid flossing and brushing the area for two weeks. Use the Q-tip method instead to keep the area clean without damaging the grafts. Do not look at the grafts in your mouth because it can put tension on the tissue flaps causing stitches to break or the site to relapse. Absolutely NO SMOKING. This can risk complete failure of the soft tissue graft.

Medications:

Take your prescribed pain medications and antibiotics as directed. Pain killers should be taken before the freezing wears off after the procedure to prevent the sudden onset of pain. If you are no longer in pain you do not need to keep taking the pain killers. You do however need to complete the prescribed antibiotic course as instructed.

Bleeding:

- Bleeding or oozing is common in the first 24-48 hours after the surgery
- You will have the donor site in the palate either sutured closed or have a dressing or packing placed over the donor site to clot the wound and prevent future bleeding. Please be gentle and careful with these dressings or packings.
- If excessive bleeding occurs apply the damp gauze as instructed with firm direct pressure on the site. A tea bag can also be used in place of the gauze to help aid in clotting.
- If the palatal donor site starts to bleed a few days after, use damp gauze and place it on the donor bleeding site with gentle thumb pressure to help induce the clot. When your hand gets tired you can use your tongue to hold the gauze in place. Keep it there for at least 30 - 60 minutes. Once the site has clotted you need to be very gentle with the area for a few days.

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Swelling and Bruising:

- It is normal to be swollen after the surgery. The swelling will increase for 48 hours before it starts to slowly come down.
- It is important to use an ice pack on the outside of the mouth and cheek area the day of surgery to help reduce the swelling and bruising. The pack can be applied every 15-20 minutes for the next few hours after the surgery.
- You may see bruising show up a few days after the surgery in the jawline, cheeks, around the eyes, or even neck and collar bone if you are on blood thinners.
- The swelling can get quite large the first few days so do not be alarmed.

Eating:

- You will need to eat soft foods and use the opposite side of your mouth to chew in order to protect the grafted sites.
- Do not eat any food until the freezing has worn off to prevent biting your cheek or tongue.
- Avoid hot foods the day of the surgery to prevent further bleeding or oozing.
- Avoid foods that are hard and crunchy that may break in to small pieces or have small seeds in them that can get stuck around the surgical sites and risk infections.
- Drink plenty of liquids to stay hydrated
- Foods like soup, cottage cheese, yogurt, mash potatoes, boiled carrots, boiled eggs, fish, bananas, and protein shakes are safe to consume right after the surgery.

Rest:

- Avoid any strenuous activity or heavy lifting the first 4-5 days after your surgery. This will help reduce the pain and swelling during your postoperative period.
- Sleeping with your head elevated can help with being comfortable right after the surgery.
- Avoid exercise for at least minimum 72 hours

Smoking:

- Smoking will delay healing and can increase the risk of graft failure or infection.
- Smoking should be avoided for as long as possible

Stitches:

- The stitches can remain in place for 2-4 weeks
- Do not pull or try to remove any stitches by yourself