Wound Care – Skin Graft

Post-Operative Care Instructions

Care:

- Use *Wound Care – Incision* instruction sheet for your donor site except do not shower as instructed.
- The skin graft recipient site is usually secured with a bolster dressing (gauze pads) tied down by multiple sutures. This stabilizes the skin graft and allows a blood supply to grow into the skin graft. Avoid side to side shearing motions (do not rub the bolster dressing) which may break the delicate blood vessels growing into skin graft.
- Keep the bolster dressing dry for 5-7 days until your follow up appointment with your surgeon. At that time, your surgeon will remove the bolster dressing.
  - After the bolster dressing is removed, continue to avoid side to side shearing motions and do not rub the skin graft.
- Fill the skin graft area with a thick layer of Aquaphor Healing Ointment to protect the skin graft.
  - You can purchase Aquaphor at any drug store, pharmacy or supermarket without a prescription.
  - Gently spread the ointment without rubbing the graft itself. A thick layer of ointment makes this maneuver possible.
  - Check it 3 times a day. Add more ointment if needed.
  - Do not scoop out the old ointment. You may get the skin graft area slightly wet.
  - Do not soak the skin graft in water. You may start showering, but cover the skin graft area with a plastic cover or gauze pad if possible.
  - You should not soak the skin graft area until you discussed this with your surgeon.
- You may cover the graft area with a dressing or band aid, but it is not necessary.
- Please make sure the adhesive is not on the skin graft to prevent tearing off the skin graft with dressing change.
- Your surgeon may want to check on the skin graft in 1-3 weeks. Your surgeon will give you further instructions depending on your need and your surgeon’s preference.

Expectations:

- It is common for a small portion of the skin graft to die. It does not affect the final outcome. There is no need for concern.
- Smokers and patients with chronic diseases (diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.) have higher skin graft failure rates. Failed skin grafts will function as biological band aids to promote healing.

If you have any questions or problems, please call your doctor.

Department of Head and Neck Surgery
925-295-4100