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# Postoperative Instructions

## **SKIN GRAFTS AND DONOR SITE CARE**

### **SKIN GRAFT CARE**

#### **Bolster Care**

At the time of your surgery, Dr. Wendel may apply a dressing called a bolster. A bolster is a type of dressing that is sewn on top of a skin graft. This dressing remains in place until your follow-up visit in the office 5-7 days after surgery.

A bolster holds the skin graft in place to prevent movement of the graft on the underlying tissue, thereby allowing blood supply growth into the graft. The bolster also prevents fluid from accumulating under the graft, such as blood or serum, which could cause the skin graft not to stick or develop circulation. It keeps the skin graft secure and protects it.

Depending on the location of the bolster and type of graft, FTSG = full thickness skin graft and STSG = split thickness skin graft, you may not be able to shower until your skin graft is adherent with good durable blood supply. This is usually 10-14 days after surgery.

Keep the bolster clean and dry until seen by Dr. Wendel or his nurse. Under no circumstances are you to attempt to remove the bolster on your own.

#### **Skin Graft Care After Bolster Removal**

After bolster removal, you will need to perform a daily dressing change to the surface of the skin graft. Dr. Wendel recommends Xeroform gauze-dressing changes as follows:

Remove the old dressing and discard.

Apply clean Xeroform gauze, with or without antibiotic ointment, to the skin graft area making sure that the entire graft is covered.

Cover the Xeroform with absorbent gauze and secure with medical tape. Other ways to secure the gauze include: ace wrap, stockinet, abdominal binder, compression garment, Band net, etc.

Perform this dressing change until all of the skin graft is healed and there are no longer any open wounds.

Do not shower or wash the skin graft until instructed to do so.

Adaptic gauze may be used when Xeroform gauze is not available.

### **DONOR SITE CARE**

The donor site is the area on the body where the skin graft was harvested. The thigh or buttock is a common location.

### **Donor Site with Tegaderm**

Dr. Wendel may have applied a dressing called a Tegaderm to your skin graft donor site. This dressing is intended to reduce pain and to keep fluids in. Do not remove it. Dr. Wendel or his nurse will remove it in the office.

Amber or red fluid will collect under this dressing and you will be able to see it. As long as the dressing remains sealed, and no drainage comes out, there is little concern for infection. The fluid is produced by your body, and is a natural response to the wound.

If there is an excessive amount of fluid under the Tegaderm or the fluid begins leaking around the dressing, call the office and speak with the nurse. The dressing may need to be reinforced with an additional piece of Tegaderm or it may need to be changed. Please call the office for guidance and directions should this occur (615) 921-2100.

### **Donor Site with Xeroform**

Dr. Wendel may have applied a dressing called Xeroform to your skin graft donor site. It is covered with a large white bulky dressing and may also be wrapped with an Ace wrap. This dressing applies a small amount of pressure to the wound to help stop any residual bleeding. The Ace wrap (if used) and bulky dressing stay in place until the morning after surgery.

The day after your surgery, remove the Ace wrap (if used) and the bulky white dressing from your donor site. When you take off this dressing you will find yellow gauze stapled to your skin. This is the Xeroform. Do not remove or attempt to remove it.

Leave the Xeroform gauze dressing open to air at all times and allow it to dry. Take a blow dryer set to the "Cool" or "Low" setting and blow-dry the yellow dressing for 15 minutes 3-4 times daily. Continue this for 5 days or until the yellow dressing remains completely dry.

Typically, you may shower two weeks after the date of surgery. After your shower, towel dry the area, if wet, and then use the blow dryer for 15 minutes as directed above.

Possible problems:

The bulky dressing can fall down when you get home from the hospital. If this happens, rewrap the area with a clean dry dressing and tape it securely to your skin with medical tape. Remember to take this bulky dressing off the morning after your surgery and leave the yellow Xeroform gauze in place.

While the wound is wet, you may cover the yellow gauze at night with dry gauzes to prevent the soiling your bedding. Remember to remove this covering gauze in the morning and use the blow dryer as directed on the Xeroform gauze.

If the yellow dressing does not cover the entire open wound or the skin around the yellow dressing becomes red and more painful, call the clinic and speak to a nurse (615) 921-2100.

**Follow-Up Care at the Clinic:**

Attend your first follow-up visit for removal of the surgical clips from the edge of the yellow Xeroform dressing.

Once the clips are removed and the area begins to heal, the edges of the yellow dressing will start to curl up. You may trim the curled edges with clean scissors. As the tissue under the yellow dressing heals, you will see more curling up of the edges. Continue to trim away the curled edges until the entire dressing is removed. The entire process may take several weeks. Do not attempt to trim away yellow dressing that is still stuck to the donor site.

**For Medical Questions, Please Call:**

(615) 921-2100 Monday-Thursday 9:00 AM-5:00 PM and Fridays 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM. After hours and on weekends, the answering service will contact Dr. Wendel or the plastic surgeon on call.