

STERNOTOMY DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

**If your chest was cut open for open heart surgery, the incision down the middle of your chest is called a sternotomy.*

**Surgery will take a lot of strength and energy out of you. You may tire easily, but this will slowly and steadily improve over the following weeks.*

Diet:

Eat a “heart healthy”, low salt diet.

Maintain a balanced diet and remember your body needs protein to heal. Foods high in protein are meats (limit red meat), lean meats are best, chicken, fish, beans and legumes (this includes hummus), and dairy products (milks and cheeses).

Be sure to eat plenty fruits and vegetables. They contain lots of vitamins and minerals.

*If you were on a special diet for any reason before surgery, please resume that diet.

Restrictions:

*No lifting more than 5-8 lbs for **2 months** (FYI: 1 gallon of milk weighs approximately 8 lbs).*

*Do not drive any automobile, truck, tractor, boat, or ATV for **1 month**.* Even if you are not taking pain medications, the effects of anesthesia can still last.

Activity and Exercise:

Shower daily. *Do not rub, scrub, or soak incision.*

Walk at least 3 times every day. Start by walking a comfortable amount of time (6-8 minutes) and increase by 1 minute every day. Keep a record of this and build from it. You can walk anywhere you’d like (inside, outside, treadmills, stairs, etc). You cannot walk too much if you are feeling good! Be cautious of the weather (extremely hot or cold days) if you are walking outside.

You may tire more easily than you would expect. Remember to pace yourself. Rest when you are tired.

TED hose (stockings) are to be used, as needed, for leg swelling. Wear these during the day, but take off at night.

Relaxation and deep breathing exercises will help your anxiety and strengthen your lungs.

Continue to use your incentive spirometer 10x an hour, while awake.

Do not do any heavy lifting, chin ups, pull ups, or push ups until cleared by Dr. Lewis during his follow-up appointment. These activities may keep your sternum from healing.

Sex: Resuming sexual activity is generally fine. However, do not strain or put pressure on your sternotomy. Generally speaking if you’re concerned, refrain for one month.

Wound care:

Leave the wound vac on the chest incision for 7-10 days. It will turn off (the battery dies) and puff up. You may then remove it and throw it away. Wash incision site with soap and water. Pat dry. *Do not soak in bathtub.*

Groin care: keep clean and dry. Clean with rubbing alcohol, as needed. After cleaning or showering, pat dry. If you need to cover it with a dry dressing in order for it to stay dry, then you may do so.

The staples will be removed by Dr. Lewis in 2-3 weeks after discharge during your follow-up appointment with him.

Showering daily is fine.

Medications:

Take all medications as directed.

When taking pain medications, try not to wait and take it until the pain is very severe. Rather, take it at the first sign of pain.

Do not drive while on pain medications.

Sleeping:

Try to get at least 7 hours of sleep at night. Your body needs this to heal. Immediately after surgery, you may have trouble sleeping longer than a few hours at a time.

You may sleep in any position that is most comfortable.

Constipation:

Constipation is often a problem after surgery and is complicated by anesthesia and pain medications.

Use an over the counter stool softener, if needed, as directed.

You may also consider a mild laxative such as milk of magnesia or *Metamucil*.

If you are not having bowel movements (unrelieved by OTC medications) or having continuous diarrhea, call your primary doctor or the office.

Follow up:

Follow up with your primary care doctor within 1 week.

Follow up with your cardiologist within 1-2 weeks.

Follow up with the nurse practitioner in 2 weeks and Dr. Lewis in 1 month.

Call Dr. Lewis' office with any concerns. Try to call during regular business hours for the quickest care (Monday-Friday 7:30-4 pm).

*****Please be aware of the following, and we specifically want you to call the office if you're experiencing any of these symptoms:**

Fever over 102.

Incision site becomes reddened, swollen, hot to touch, or malodorous.

Incision drainage has not stopped, increased, or changed looks (please tell us if you see pus).

If you feel a "popping" sensation from your chest/sternotomy. This may occur when you cough, sneeze, laugh, breathe deeply, etc. We ask you to use your pillow during these activities to prevent this from happening.

If you pass out or have symptoms like you will (dizziness, black out spells, etc).

If you feel your heart racing or beating irregularly, please call us or your cardiologist.

Please weigh yourself daily, at the same time every day. If you gain more than **5 lbs** in a **24 hour** period, please call the office.

QUESTIONS???

The hospital/charge nurse: (205) 783-7350

Dr. Clifton Lewis' office: (205) 786-2776