Intermountain® Healthcare

Nose and Sinus Surgeries: *Discharge Instructions*

Taking care of yourself after surgery can speed your recovery, reduce follow-up visits to the doctor, and help you feel better as you heal.

This handout explains how to care for yourself when you get home. If your healthcare providers tell you something different, follow what they say. There's space at the end of this handout to write in additional instructions.

What are nose and sinus surgeries?

Nose and sinus surgeries are any of several procedures to improve your ability to breathe through your nose or to improve the appearance of your nose. You may have had nose or sinus surgery if your airway was blocked and you were having trouble breathing or if you had repeated sinus infections or allergies. Most nose and sinus surgeries are done through the nostrils, so no scars show on your face. Rhinoplasty may involve an incision near the bridge of the nose, but scarring is usually minimal or nonexistent.

What should I expect after surgery?

- **The first couple of days** after your surgery will be the most uncomfortable.
- **Your nose may be sore** in the area of the surgery. You may also feel tenderness in your upper teeth and the roof of your mouth.
- **If you had rhinoplasty, you may have some bruising and swelling** around the eyes. (Some patients develop black eyes.)
- **Your nose may feel stuffy and uncomfortable** until the swelling goes down, about a week or two after surgery. There will be some drainage from your nose. It will be bloody at the beginning, but will gradually lighten in color and decrease over time.
- **You may have nasal packing**. Your nose may be packed with mesh or gauze for the first day after surgery. If your nose is packed, you need to breathe through your mouth, and your mouth will be dry.
- **If you have splints or internal tubes** on the inside or outside of your nose, the doctor will remove them about a week after surgery.

How do I care for myself at home?

The first 24 hours

- **Stay on the couch or in bed.** Don't be too active. Keep your head elevated.
- **Manage any bleeding.** You may bleed from your nose and possibly down the back of your throat. Continue to rest and use gauze pads as directed to absorb the blood. At first you may soak through a gauze pad every half hour, but this should reduce after the first day. If you feel blood draining down the back of your throat, spit it out. If you swallow it, you may become very nauseated.
- **Do not blow your nose.** If there are blood clots at the end of your nose, wipe them with a damp cloth. Don't put anything in your nose unless directed to do so by your doctor. If you have to sneeze, do it with your mouth open.
- **Drink clear liquids.** This will help control nausea. When you are doing well with clear liquids, slowly add other liquids and easily digestible foods.
- **Follow your doctor's directions for taking your pain medications** and eat a little food with your medications to reduce stomach upset.
- **Sleep with your head elevated to about 30° —** use two or three pillows.

The first weeks after surgery

You may have one or more of these side effects the first weeks after surgery:

- Tenderness on the inside or outside of your nose
- Tenderness in your upper teeth and the roof of your mouth
- More headaches than usual
- Earaches in one or both ears

Caring for your nose

- **Don't blow your nose.** You may sniff gently.
- **Use a vaporizer or humidifier.** This adds moisture to the air and helps thin your nasal discharge. Wash the humidifier every day to keep it free of germs.
- **Wash your hands often,** especially when you've been around someone who is sick. This will help prevent the spread of germs.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoke irritates your nose. Quitting will help you heal faster. If you haven't quit already, this is a good time to try again.
- **If you had rhinoplasty:**
  - **Keep your bandages dry**. Do NOT get the dressing on the bridge of your nose wet. Keeping your bandages dry prevents infection and speeds healing.
  - **Keep your dressings on** (unless directed otherwise). Your dressings keep your nose in the correct position for healing and protect your nose from injury.

Activity

- **Take it easy.** Avoid heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for 2 weeks.
- **Don't fly in an airplane** or do any travel requiring fast elevation changes until your doctor says it's okay.

Medications

After your nose or sinus surgery, your surgeon will prescribe medications to help you recover.

Your medications may include:

- **Antibiotics** to help prevent infections caused by bacteria. It's important to take them exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Keep taking them until they're completely gone.
- **Pain medication** to control or decrease your pain. Take your medications as your doctor directed. This will keep your pain from becoming severe and make it easier to manage. Eventually the pain will decrease and you can wait longer between doses. If your pain medication doesn't help, be sure to tell your doctor.

Follow-up visit

Ask your healthcare providers when you should schedule a follow-up visit. Most patients visit their doctor within a week of surgery.

Your follow-up appointment is:

When _____

Where _____

When to call your doctor

Contact your doctor right away if you have:

- Change in vision
- Fever over 101°F
- Chills, a cough, weakness
- After the first day, blood soaking a gauze pad more often than once every 30 minutes
- Pain that is not controlled by pain medication
- Continued nausea or vomiting

Additional instructions:

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