

## After Your Chiari Decompression

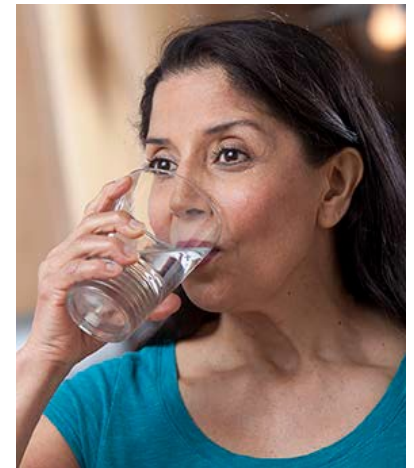
### *Self-care at home*

*This handout explains care after your procedure, including self-care at home and when to call the doctor.*

### **Pain Control**

#### **For Mild to Moderate Pain**

For mild to moderate pain, you may take ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn), or other *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs* (NSAIDs). If you have a sensitive stomach, try acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead of NSAIDs. Follow dose instructions on the bottle.



*Always take medicines exactly as your doctor prescribed.*

#### **For Stronger Pain**

For strong pain, some patients may take prescription pain medicines for 1 to 2 weeks after surgery. Your doctor may prescribe:

- *Opioid* pain medicine if you have severe neck pain. Opioids help control short-term pain when other pain medicines are not enough.
- A *benzodiazepine* such as Valium for neck spasms.

### **About Prescription Medicines**

- We will prescribe opioids or Valium for **ONLY 1 to 2 weeks after surgery**. We want to help you avoid becoming addicted to these medicines. Addiction can sometimes happen when these medicines are used to treat pain after surgery.
- If you feel you need to take prescription pain medicine longer than 1 to 2 weeks, it could be a sign of something more serious. Make an appointment to see us or your primary care provider (PCP).
- We will teach you how to *taper* your medicines. This means you will start taking your pills less often, and also take smaller doses over

time. While you are tapering your opioids, you may have these symptoms from time to time:

- *Tension headaches* (dull pressure)
- *Spasms* (cramping) in your neck muscles
- Discomfort around the area of your incision
- If you are near the end of your 2-week prescription, and you feel you still need relief for strong pain:
  - Talk with your primary care provider (PCP).
  - Meet with the provider who prescribes your long-term pain medicines.
- If your providers approve you for a refill of your pain medicine:
  - Fill it before your opioids run out.
  - Call the Neurosurgery Clinic at 206.744.9300 and press 2.

### Other Ways to Treat Pain

- Use an ice pack on the incision area every 2 to 3 hours, for 10 to 20 minutes. Place a clean, dry cloth between the ice pack and your skin. **Never** place ice directly on your skin.
- Try reading, listening to music, deep breathing, or doing other activities that keep you from thinking about the pain.

### Steroid Medicines

If you were prescribed a **steroid** such as dexamethasone:

- Finish the prescription as instructed.
- To protect your stomach from irritation, take an antacid. You can buy these medicines at your drugstore without a prescription:
  - Tums, taken every 3 to 4 hours
  - H-2 blockers such as Pepcid, taken every 12 hours
  - Protonics such as Prilosec, taken once a day

When tapering your steroid use, you may have:

- Moderate or severe headaches
- Light sensitivity
- Stiff neck
- Nausea or an overall feeling of discomfort

These could be normal side effects, but please contact our office to consider a longer dose of your medicine.

## Recovery At Home

### For 2 weeks:

- Limit bending or twisting your neck. You can move it gently.
- Do **not** lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds. (A gallon of milk weighs almost 9 pounds.)
- Limit driving for 2 to 4 weeks after surgery. After that time, you may ride or drive as your tolerance and range of motion safely allows. Do **not** drive if you are still taking opioids.
- Walk often to speed your recovery.

### After 2 weeks:

- You may progress to lifting up to 25 pounds.
- Slowly begin normal activities as you can.

## Prevent Constipation

Prescription pain medicines can cause constipation. Avoid straining when having a bowel movement. To keep from becoming constipated:

- Drink lots of fluids.
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and green leafy vegetables.
- Use a gentle stool softener, such as Colace or Dulcolax.

## Incision Care

- Most patients do not need a bandage on the incision. Follow the care instructions you received when you left the hospital.
- To avoid infection:
  - Wash your hands before touching the incision.
  - Do **not** remove any scabs along the incision.
  - Keep the incision dry for 5 days.
  - After 5 days, you may shower. Gently wash around the incision with mild soap. Do **not** rub the incision. Pat dry with a clean towel.
  - Do **not** take a bath, swim, or cover the incision with water until it is fully healed.

## What to Expect

- It is normal to have numbness at the incision site for a few months.
- You will have a small amount of drainage or dried blood. This should slowly get less, day by day.

## When to Call

Call your doctor or nurse if you have:

- Fever higher than 101.5°F (39.6°C)
- Chills or night sweats
- Redness, heat, increased or pus-like drainage, clear watery drainage, or if the edges of your wound are opening
- A headache that gets worse, even when you take your pain medicine
- A headache that is worse when sitting or standing
- Stiff neck
- Problems swallowing
- Nausea
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Changes in your vision
- Numbness or weakness in your arms
- Extreme sleepiness (*lethargy*)

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or other healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.







Weekdays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., call Harborview Neurosurgery Center: 206.744.9300 and press 2 when you hear the recording.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.744.9300 and you will be given options to be connected with a nurse.

### Urgent Care Needs

Call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- Sudden, severe headache
- Sudden, severe nausea and vomiting
- Confusion
- Sudden weakness
- Symptoms of a stroke (see chart below)

B	E	F	A	S	T
<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>EYES</b>	<b>FACE</b>	<b>ARMS</b>	<b>SPEECH</b>	<b>TIME</b>
					
Balance problems, headache, dizzy	Blurred vision	One side of face droops	Arm or leg weakness	Speech problems	Time to call 911!

The letters **BE FAST** tell what stroke symptoms look like, and what to do when symptoms occur.