



## WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY

Here you'll find information about what to expect **immediately after surgery**, and **postoperative instructions** checklist for when you are discharged from the hospital.

### **Immediately After Surgery**

- ❑ After your heart surgery, you will be taken to the Cardiovascular Unit (CVU) where your family will be able to visit for a short time immediately after surgery.
- ❑ When you wake up after surgery, you will have the breathing tube in for a short while and your hands may be restrained to keep you from injuring yourself until you are fully awake.
- ❑ You will also have tubes and/or lines in place that your doctors and nurses will use to monitor your progress. An arterial line will be in your wrist, a Swan-Ganz catheter will be in your neck, pacing wires will be in your chest, and chest tubes will be in place to drain excess blood/fluid from your chest.
- ❑ Once the breathing tube is removed, it is very important to breathe deep and cough so you can expand or re-inflate your lungs. This will help to prevent postoperative complications and speed up your recovery. You will be given an incentive spirometer to help you take deep breaths after surgery. The respiratory therapist as well as the nurses will help you use it.
- ❑ You will receive a Heart Institute pillow. Please hug this pillow when coughing, sneezing or laughing. The "hug" is referred to as "splinting." Don't forget to get your pillow signed by the nurses and surgical team before leaving the hospital.
- ❑ You will be given pain medication, routinely at first, to make you more comfortable. Please remember to tell your nurse if you are having pain.

### **Cardiothoracic Postoperative Discharge Instructions**

#### **CALL THE DOCTOR IF:**

- ❑ You have an oral temperature greater than 101 degrees
- ❑ You are having pain that is not managed by Tylenol or a prescribed pain medications
- ❑ There is drainage from any of your incisions or if the area is swollen, tender, or hot to touch
- ❑ You are feeling blue or depressed, teary-eyed, moody, sensitive, or hostile beyond the expected one (1) month after surgery
- ❑ You are having extreme shortness of breath with exercise or walking
- ❑ When in doubt call the surgeon's office at 748-7089

## **INCISION CARE**

- ❑ Shower everyday. Please do not take a bath until all of your incisions are healed. Any type of soap can be used; it is okay for your sternal incision to get wet when showering. Simply dry it off after getting out of the shower.
- ❑ Please do not apply creams, ointments, powders or talcs to any of your incisions without checking with the surgical team. This includes antibiotic creams/ointments as well.
- ❑ Please continue to wear your TED Hose Stockings after discharge from the hospital **during the day**. Remove them before going to bed at night.

## **EXERCISE/ACTIVITY GUIDELINES**

- ❑ Walk everyday in the morning and evening. During hot or cold spells, you can walk at the local mall. Walking down the stairs is permitted but please remember to walk slowly up the stairs and with assistance whenever possible.
- ❑ Do not lift, push or pull more than five (5) pounds for the first 30 days after surgery. Please remember that a gallon of milk weighs approximately eight (8) pounds.
- ❑ Fatigue is common after surgery. This will last for approximately four to six weeks. Please take naps when necessary.
- ❑ Driving is prohibited for 30 days from the date of your surgery. When riding in the car, please ride in the back seat. Please discuss long-distance traveling with your surgical team before trying to take a far trip.
- ❑ Sexual activity may be resumed after discharge from the hospital

## **STERNAL PRECAUTIONS:**

Follow the precautions below for eight to 10 weeks after your cardiac surgery. These precautions help to ensure that your sternum stays in alignment while it is healing.

- ❑ DO NOT raise both arms overhead at the same time. One arm at a time is permissible. You can raise both arms to the shoulder level simultaneously, however.
- ❑ DO NOT reach behind your back with both hands at the same time
- ❑ DO NOT lift, push or pull more than five (5) pounds for the first 30 days after surgery; please remember that a gallon of milk weighs approximately eight (8) pounds.
- ❑ DO NOT drive for 30 days from the date of your surgery. When riding in the car, please ride in the back seat of the car.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

- ❑ Sleeping is usually best on your back or side. Propping yourself with pillows seems to allow for greater comfort. Many people find that sleeping in a recliner is the most comfortable position for several weeks after surgery. Sleeping on your stomach is allowable if you are able to do so.
- ❑ Muscle aches along the shoulders, back, shoulder blades and upper arms are common after surgery. If you have pain, try a warm shower, Tylenol, or the prescribed pain medication to relieve soreness.
- ❑ Decreased appetite is common after surgery. Please do not add salt to food and try to avoid high-fat foods.

- For the first month or so, you may notice an inability to read or concentrate, this is very common and will improve with time.

**RETURNING TO WORK:**

Most patients do not return to work for 90 days from the date of surgery. Please give any work papers to the surgical team for completion. All work papers are completed on Fridays and can be picked up the following Monday at the cardiothoracic surgeon's office located on the first floor at the hospital.