

## **Secondary Intention Wound Care Instructions Following Mohs**

### **What is a Mohs Procedure:**

- You have just undergone a Mohs procedure and left with a defect to heal via secondary intent (open wound). If unfamiliar, Mohs is a specialized surgical technique used to treat skin cancer on the head and neck, for large or aggressive tumors, or those with unclear margins. A Mohs procedure involves precise removal of cancerous tissue layer by layer until clear margins are examined under a microscope.

### **What are my Options for Closure Following Mohs?**

- Patients may be presented with the choice to be closed with sutures/stitches or may be given the option to heal by secondary intent depending on the size and/or the location of skin cancer.

### **What is Secondary Intent?**

- Secondary intent is a wound healing process in which the wound edges are not brought together by sutures/stitches or staples but instead allows the wound to heal from the base upwards by the body's natural healing process. (Wound is left open to heal)
- The rate at which a site may heal by secondary intent varies based on the size and/or location of the lesion. Other factors may also impact the rate of healing such as lifestyle choices, diabetes, being immunocompromised, and so much more.
- Additionally, lesions healings by secondary intent may require more wound care to reduce the risk of infections.

### **Wound Care for the Secondary Intent Wound Site:**

- You will be asked to leave the original dressing in place for **24 hours, 48 hours, or 72 hours**; DO NOT get the dressing wet. Please follow the instructions below thereafter.
- After \_\_\_\_\_ hours wash your hands and remove the dressing. If there is crusting or scabbing then get in the shower and soak it off, but DO NOT forcibly rub the crust of the wound.
- Gently cleanse the wound with one of the following: soap and water, saline, or \_\_\_\_\_ and pat dry with a clean gauze, cotton pad, or a soft, clean washcloth. DO NOT SWIPE AS THIS MAY CAUSE BLEEDING AT THE BASE OF THE WOUND OR AT THE WOUND EDGES.
- Apply a thin layer of ointment (Vaseline or Aquaphor) or prescription antibiotic on all suture lines using a clean, new Q-tip.
- Cover the wound with a non-stick bandage, such as a Telfa, and secure with paper tape. For smaller areas, a Band-aid may be used, but make sure the sticky part of the Band-aid does not touch the wound directly.
- Repeat your dressing changes (steps 3-6) once or twice daily depending on the amount of drainage until the wound is healed.

- As long as your drainage is not pus-like (thick, yellow, sometimes smelly), then it is unlikely to be infected.
  - Refer to *When Should I Call the Office* below for signs/symptoms of a possible infection that should prompt you to contact the office.

### **Activities After Surgery:**

- For \_\_\_\_\_ hours after surgery, DO NOT get the dressing wet.
- For 48 hours after surgery, avoid alcohol consumption.
- For 1 week after surgery, avoid any activity that stretches your wound, increases your heart rate, or rubs against your dressing. Avoid sports, vacuuming, bending below your waist, or lifting more than 10 lbs.
- Face surgery: DO NOT bend your head below your waist. Keep your head elevated with 1 or 2 extra pillows when sleeping or lying down.
- Arm or leg surgery: Raise the limb as much as possible above your waist when you are resting.
- Baths/ swimming / hot tubs: Avoid submerging the wound under water until the wound is healed or otherwise approved by your provider.
- Discontinue smoking. Smoking slows wound healing, increases risk of infection, and may result in a more prominent scar.
- Remember to use broad-spectrum sunscreen with Zinc or Titanium Dioxide and at least a SPF of 30 or higher once the area has healed.

### **Pain, Swelling, Redness, Bruising, Drainage:**

- It is normal to have some swelling, redness, and/or bruising—all of which will improve over time (days to weeks).
- Elevating the wound on extra pillows will help reduce swelling in the affected area.
- Applying a cold compress (bag of frozen peas) will also help to reduce swelling in the affected area.
- Once you get home, hold the ice pack against the dressing for 10 minutes several times per hour. Continue this until bedtime and even the following day. DO NOT apply the cold compress directly on your skin.

There may be some clear wound draining, which should stop after a few days.

- The drainage may be pink or yellow in color, which is also normal.
- The drainage may last longer if the wound was left open to heal and not stitched closed.
- If your pain is not controlled with cold compresses, you may take extra strength Tylenol (acetaminophen 500 mg) as needed unless you are allergic, you have liver disease, or a provider has instructed you to not take acetaminophen due to other medical conditions.
- If your pain is not relieved with cold compresses AND extra strength Tylenol (acetaminophen 500 mg, DO NOT EXCEED 2.5 GRAMS PER DAY), then please call the office. Please see below for contact numbers during normal business hours and after business hours.

### **Bleeding After Surgery:**

- Bleeding after surgery is uncommon but may be seen in the first 48 hours, especially for wounds healing via secondary intent.
- If you are bleeding, please follow the instructions below:
  1. Lie down, elevate the wound if possible.
  2. Apply continuous, firm pressure for 15 minutes. Do not stop applying pressure until 15 minutes have passed. Repeat up to 3 times.
  3. If the bleeding has soaked your dressing, it should be removed, and a new one should be placed.
  4. If the bleeding has not stopped after 3 applications of firm, uninterrupted pressure contact our office. Refer to the contact numbers provided below for the phone number during normal business hours and the after-hours phone number.

### **When Should I Call the Office?**

- Fever of 101° Fahrenheit or 38.3° Celsius or higher.
- Bleeding is not controlled by direct pressure.
- Pain that increases each day or is not relieved by over-the-counter medications.
- Rapid or increasing swelling, heat, and pain around the wound.
- Reopening of the wound at any time.
- Increased or expanding redness and warmth around the wound, or pus draining from the wound.
- Should you experience any of the above symptoms, please call contact our office at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ during normal business hours; otherwise, if after hours, please contact our after-hours line at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_, who will connect you with a healthcare provider to answer your questions and provide guidance. Please call as recommended to help avoid a visit to the emergency room.
- However, if you are unable to reach the office or a healthcare provider through the after-hours line and you have an urgent issue concerning your surgical site/wound, please call 911 or go to the emergency room.

### **Am I Able to Change My Mind?**

- Absolutely! Should you wish to have the wound site closed, please contact our office at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ EXT. \_\_\_\_\_ during normal business hours to arrange this appointment.