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Post-Operative Instructions after a Skin Graft

REST

Quiet rest these next several hours will insure early, comfortable and complete healing. This is the time to be good to yourself and be pampered. You deserve it!

Always get up slowly to prevent dizziness.

Limit physical activity.

Keep your head elevated for the remainder of the day.

COMFORT

You can expect to have discomfort when the anesthetic wears off. We suggest that you take a pain reliever before the numbness begins to wear off so that the transition will be smooth. When you begin to feel the first signs of pain, take another pain reliever as long as you are within the guidelines printed on the bottle or the ones that we discussed. If your pain medication contains codeine, wash it down with a dairy product or something to soothe your stomach.

DO NOT CONSUME ALCOHOL WHILE ON PAIN MEDICATION

For minor discomfort, you can take over the counter pain medication such as: Panadol

If the pain medication seems to wear off before it is time to take more, you may want to alternate it with Ibuprofen every two hours. (Ibuprofen: Adults do not exceed 2400 mgs.daily.)

It is normal to experience a slight feeling of weakness or chills during the first day or two after your surgery. This is part of the body's defence mechanism and is not cause for alarm.

ANTIBIOTICS

If you were prescribed an antibiotic, take it conscientiously as directed until all are gone; by stopping the antibiotics in the middle, you do more harm than good.

GRAFT

The area from which the graft tissue was taken will feel uncomfortable for several days. The feeling is sometimes described as having been burned with hot food or a hot drink.

You will have a rough feeling on the roof of your mouth. There is a glue to cover the area for a couple of days while healing. This will gradually slough off.

DO NOT touch the surgical site for the first 10 days; you could dislodge the healing tissue and compromise the success of the graft.

DO NOT pull your lip away or out to view the graft site.

It is normal for this area to undergo changes during the first couple of weeks. The tissue will appear white and filmy, (scabs are white in the wet oral environment) then it will turn very pink to red. This is normal healing of the graft.

DRESSING (Bandage-Periodontal Pack)

Sometimes a surgical dressing is placed around the teeth in the surgical site. It serves to protect the area from irritants like coarse or spicy foods. If small pieces of the dressing are lost or even if the whole thing is dislodged, do not worry. The dressing really does not affect healing so if you are comfortable there is no reason to replace it.

SMOKING

We strongly advise against **SMOKING** after surgery. Smoking delays healing, increases discomfort, and may encourage bleeding and infection in the surgical site.

SWELLING

You may experience some swelling of the face or jaw around the surgical area. It may start during the first 24 hours, last a few days, and then begin to subside. This is a normal defence mechanism and is no cause for alarm. Swelling peaks 30-36 hours post surgically. Some patients tend to bruise on the cheek adjacent to the surgical are; this is normal as well. If swelling or bruising persist and concern you, do not hesitate to give us a call.

BLEEDING

Some oozing of blood from the surgical site is normal during the first 24 hours you may notice pink streaks in your saliva. If the bleeding appears more than described than you can apply pressure to the area. If it is the site in the roof of your mouth you can either fold a cold washcloth or use a damp regular (not herbal) tea bag and with your thumb apply firm pressure to area for 20 minutes. If it is from the area where the graft was placed, apply pressure to the outside of the face directly over the area.

You should not rinse your mouth for the first 24 hours.

If you are unable to control the bleeding in this manner, or if it is where the graft was placed give us a call right away.

Another helpful suggestion is to sleep with your head elevated by a couple pillows the first night after surgery.

ORAL HYGIENE

You will not be able to brush or floss the area covered by the dressing but you should continue normal procedures in the rest of your mouth. After 24 hours, gently swish warm salt water 4 times a day. Warm salt-water rinses made with 1/2 teaspoon of salt in a 4 oz. glass of warm water is encouraged after 24 hours to aid healing.

In some cases you may be given a special rinse to use; you can alternate the special rinse with warm salt water rinses and follow the directions given. You should use a gentle, very soft bristle brush or run it under hot water to soften the bristles. Clean the teeth, but avoid the specific surgical area until you return to your post-operative visit.

DIET

The importance of a nutritious diet cannot be overemphasized, especially during this healing period when your body is stressed. If you eat good, soft foods, you will feel better, remain more comfortable and heal faster.

Drink plenty of fluids. The entire day of surgery you should consume 6-8 glasses of water.

Avoid eating on the treated side, if possible. A liquid diet is best for the first 1 or 2 meals, consume substances such as: milkshakes, smoothies, Ensure, Boost, Instant Breakfast, yogurts. Avoid hot liquids for the first several hours; cold liquids are encouraged. Be careful of extreme temperatures on the roof of your mouth until you know what you can tolerate. Soft foods should be eaten during the first 5-7 days because they require little pressure to chew.

Vitamin C aids healing so orange juice and tomato juice are excellent. You should also continue with your normal vitamin supplements.

POST-OPERATIVE VISITS

At the first post-operative visit, we will remove the dressing and any sutures that were placed. The teeth in the surgical site will be polished to remove plaque so that a clean environment can be established, which is conducive for healing. Although the gums will be on the road to healing at this time, important healing must continue under the gum line for several months. At the second post-operative visit, we will polish the teeth again.

Both of these visits are short and you should expect little, if any discomfort.

MAINTENANCE PHASE

It is imperative that you continue a rigorous home care program. You were taught how to maintain a plaque-free mouth prior to the surgical phase and you are aware of the importance of personal oral hygiene in successful periodontal therapy. It also is a must that you continue with your Periodontal Maintenance appointments on your recommended schedule. These will help maintain the time and money you have invested in your improved dental health.