

Surgery Pre-Operative Instructions

The growth on your skin could be treated by “destruction”, “shave” or “excision”. Each method has a place, and certain advantages. All are minor surgery, and this page contains answers to common questions.

Avoid blood thinners when possible

We frequently perform minor surgery on people taking blood thinners, but there are more problems with excessive bleeding and bruising when this is done. Aspirin makes people bleed more easily, and we prefer that patients not take it for seven to ten days before surgery and for 24 hours after surgery. If you are taking aspirin or a medicine containing aspirin on your own, please stop it for seven days before surgery. However, if you are taking aspirin on a doctor’s order, ask your doctor if you can temporarily stop it and inform us of the decision before the surgery date. Alcohol, even one beer a day, will thin the blood. Do not drink any alcoholic beverages for three days prior to surgery. Patients on Coumadin (Warfarin) can have excessive bleeding if they take the herbs Garlic, Ginger, or Ginko Biloba. Feverfew, another herbal remedy, inhibits platelet activity and may also increase bleeding during surgery.

Local Anesthetics

We normally use buffered lidocaine for anesthesia. It stings only slightly when injected, but there is no pain during surgery. The anesthetic numbs only the area of surgery and afterward you will be able to drive home. If you are a very nervous patient, a light oral sedative can be given, but you must be awake during surgery. It is always a good idea to have someone drive you in any case if don’t feel up to it afterwards. For those who are extremely sensitive to pain, we can give you a prescription for a cream to numb your skin (Ela-max) and then use a special painless local anesthetic before the lidocaine.

Antibiotics

In general, we believe antibiotics are not needed, and do more harm than good with skin surgery. People who have joint replacements, have artificial heart valves, or who have heart murmurs often must take antibiotics before surgery, invasive procedures and dental procedures. However, the available antibiotic pills do not kill the bacteria normally on the skin. The exception to this is if the area being worked on is infected at the time of the procedure, then antibiotics are needed. You can check with the doctor who worked on your heart or joints and follow their advice. At times antibiotics will be given to patients thought to be at unusually high risk of infection.

Biopsy

After your skin growth is removed surgically in the office it will be sent for microscopic pathology examination. This will confirm our diagnosis and also serve to be certain it has been completely removed. Strictly speaking, the term biopsy refers to a small piece taken as a diagnostic test—a partial removal. However, the term is commonly used in this way. You will be notified of the results within 2 weeks.

Reactions and Allergies

Warn us before we start if you have had a bad reaction or allergy from minor surgery. Its best to remind us on the day of surgery if you have allergies to the medications or dressings commonly used. These include local anesthetics (usually the epinephrine in Lidocaine), tape and Polysporin or other antibiotic ointments. Be sure we know if you are on a blood thinning medication (Plavix, Aspirin, anti-inflammatory or anti-arthritis medicines, coumadin) or have a history of significant heart trouble or have a pacemaker. Serious reactions, even in elderly or ill patients, are extremely rare.

Discomfort

There is no pain during surgery. Postoperative discomfort is usually mild, and lasts only 12 to 24 hours after surgery. If it lasts longer, or if you have severe pain, please call our office. If a painkiller is needed, take Tylenol.

Medications

On the day of surgery, continue to take all regularly prescribed medications unless specifically told not to.

Post-Operative Care

Your wound will be bandaged, and you will be given instructions telling you exactly how to take care of it.

Scarring

When skin heals, it does so by forming a scar. Every effort will be made to minimize the scar. Often a scar may be barely visible, especially if the skin is wrinkled. However, on the chest, shoulders, back, arms and legs, scars usually spread, often become thickened, and may be noticeable. Warn us if you are known to “keloid.”

Smoking

If you smoke, try and limit yourself to just a few cigarettes from the day before to the day after surgery. Smoking lowers your oxygen level and interferes with healing. Smokers always heal slower and scar more.

Stitches

Stitches (sutures) are used to close the wound after surgery. The type of stitch we use depends on the surgery and your skin. Stitches that need removal are usually taken out 6 to 14 days after surgery. Stitch removal is usually painless and takes only a few minutes.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask when you come in. If you'd like to bring someone with you, please do. You may also have them present during surgery.

Vitamins

You should take Vitamin C, 500-mg twice daily and Zinc sulfate, containing 50-mg elemental zinc with dinner starting 3 days before the surgery. Vitamin E will thin the blood. Avoid taking more than 200 IU daily for the week prior to surgery.