SWEDISH

THORACIC SURGERY, SWEDISH CANCER INSTITUTE

Home Instructions Following **Esophagectomy**

Diet

- When you leave the hospital, you may be restricted to a liquid or blended diet. You will receive nutritional support through your feeding tube until you are able to take in the calories that you need by mouth.
- Over the next few weeks, you will be advanced to a surgical soft diet that is recommended to ease the movement of food through the temporarily swollen areas of the esophagus and stomach. Tolerance to the diet is individual and may change with time. You will need to stay on a specialized diet for four to six weeks. Specific instructions will be provided to you in a separate handout.

Activities

- It is extremely important to remain active during your surgical recovery in order to prevent complications.
- Take short (10 minute) walks two to three times a day. Gradually increase the amount of time that you walk.
- Climbing stairs is also permitted.
- Do not lift more than 10 pounds for six weeks after surgery.
- You may drive when you are able to walk a flight of stairs or when you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine. Driving should always be avoided when taking prescription pain medication.
- You will be tired for some time after surgery. Stamina and strength will be slow to return. This is a normal process following any surgical procedure. Attempt to increase activities gradually, but rest when necessary.

Wound Care

- You may shower daily and wash the incision areas gently with warm water and soap. Do not plan to soak in the bathtub or go swimming for four weeks.
- Steri-strips taped over your incision may fall off on their own or may be safely removed after 10 days.
- Any remaining staples or sutures will be removed at your first follow-up visit.
- Slight bruising, itchiness and numbness at your incision are a normal part of healing.

Medications

- Pain medication will be prescribed for you at the time of discharge.
- Do not swallow pills unless you have been cleared by your doctor. Medications may need to be crushed or taken in liquid form for some time.
- Stool softeners (i.e., Colace Elixir) or laxatives (i.e., Milk of Magnesia) may be necessary after surgery as long as you need prescription pain medicine.

When can I return to school or work?

Most patients will be able to return to school, work or their usual level of activity within six weeks after surgery. This is an individualized decision between you, your doctor and your employer.

(continued)

Call the office at 206-215-6800 if you have:

- Chest pain or rapid heart rate (greater than 120 beats per minute)
- Difficulty breathing comfortably or shortness of breath
- A productive cough with discolored sputum (yellow or green)
- Fever greater than 101.5° F
- Increasing abdominal pain
- Redness around, or drainage of fluid from, the incision
- No bowel movement for two days in a row
- Nausea lasting more than 24 hours
- Increased difficulty swallowing or change in swallowing sensation
- Any other questions or concerns

During regular business hours ask to speak to our medical assistant. After hours you will speak with the physician on call.

When do I follow-up?

Please call our office at **206-215-6800** to schedule a follow-up appointment and chest X-ray.

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