

**C R A N I O T O M Y**

**PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

**What is a craniotomy?**

A craniotomy is the removal of a part of the skull to expose the brain. The procedure allows the surgeon to treat various problems within the brain. Reasons for a craniotomy include the following:

- Biopsy
- Relief of pressure in the brain
- Clot removal
- Tumor removal

**How is a craniotomy done?**

Prior to the procedure:

- You will receive medication to help relieve anxiety and prevent infection.
- An intravenous line will be started.
- A urinary catheter will be placed.
- Part of your head will be shaved to reduce the chance of infection.
- You will receive medication in the operating room to make you sleep.

**What can I expect when I wake up?**

After the craniotomy is finished, your caregivers will be closely monitoring your safety and condition. To accomplish these goals, you may require the following:

- You will be in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) for at least one day, often longer.
- Your hand(s) may need to be temporarily restrained to prevent you from inadvertently pulling out your tubes or intravenous line.
- You will be connected to equipment to help us continuously monitor your condition.
- You may hear unfamiliar sounds from the monitoring equipment (such as the breathing machine, suction equipment, alarms)
- You may have a tube in your mouth to help you breath. If so, you will be unable to talk.
- Bright lights may be turned on for long periods of time.

**What Can I Expect as I Progress?**

After any operation on the brain, it is normal to experience some confusion and lethargy or sluggishness. This will gradually resolve as you progress. As your condition improves, you can expect the following:

- If you have a breathing tube, it will be removed. This will allow you to talk. You may experience some hoarseness or a sore throat.
- Your monitoring devices will be discontinued.

## What Can I Expect as I Progress? (*Continued*)

- You will be allowed to eat. You will start by drinking liquids and slowly more foods will be added.
- Your activity will gradually be increased.
- You may experience headache, nausea, pain or discomfort. You will be given medication to relieve these symptoms.
- You will be moved to the surgical unit to continue your recovery.

### What are the possible complications of a craniotomy?

Your caregivers will be continuously monitoring your condition to avoid complications. The goal of close monitoring in the ICU is to detect problems early so they can be properly treated. After any operation on the brain, the following complications are infrequent, but possible. When complications do occur, they are often treatable.

- Bleeding
- Swelling and increasing pressure in the brain
- Seizures
- Infection

### What will happen when I go home?

Take your medicines as directed:

- Never stop any medicine without asking your doctor.
- Finish all antibiotics, even if you feel better.
- Do not drive or operate machinery if a medicine makes you drowsy.
- Continue anti-seizure medication until your doctor tells you to do otherwise. It may be as long as three months.

Control discomfort by the following methods:

- For the first 1-2 days, use an ice pack wrapped in a towel and applied to the head. This will decrease swelling and discomfort. Use it for 15-20 minutes per hour. **NEVER sleep on the ice pack!**

Changing your bandage:

- Change the bandage any time it gets wet or dirty; have someone help you if you can not do this alone.

Showering and bathing:

- When your doctor allows you to shower or bathe, gently wash the area with the stitches or staples with a mild soap and warm water; pat it dry and rebandage it.

Seeing your doctor:

- Be sure to make a follow-up appointment with your physician when you go home. Remember to write down any questions you want to ask your physician.

**If you experience any changes or have any questions, do not hesitate to call your physician.**