

## Throat Surgery Postoperative Instructions

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*The following guide contains postoperative care and instructions for you and your caregiver's review prior to your procedure and as a reference guide for after your surgery. By becoming familiar with your postoperative course, you will maximize your therapeutic benefit and reduce unnecessary anxiety. Please feel free to call or note any questions for your next visit with Dr. Pasha regarding any information on this sheet.*

### **What arrangements and equipment should I acquire prior to the day of my operation?**

- **Caretaker:** For at least the first few days, you will need someone to watch over you as you recover. This person must be a responsible adult that is also familiar with these instructions. Dr. Pasha usually reviews postoperative care with the caregiver immediately after the surgery. It is therefore best that the caregiver be present the day of the procedure to take you home.
- **Sick Leave:** You should anticipate a 10-14 day recovery period. During this period you will be on pain medications (narcotics) so you should not plan on making any important decisions or even perform light duty at home. This period should be dedicated only to recovery.



- **Bedside Humidifier:** A small bedside humidifier (warm or cool mist) reduces throat discomfort caused by mouth breathing at night.
- **Your Prescription Medications:** For your convenience, Dr. Pasha typically will arrange for your prescription to either be called into your pharmacy or be given to you on a prescription pad. Filling your prescription prior to the procedure allows you

to be assured that you will have the proper postoperative medication.

### **What should I expect immediately after my operation?**

Although your surgery may have been completed within 30-90 minutes, you will wake up in the recovery room seemingly instantly after your induction of your anesthesia. Nursing staff as well as others will be asking you questions and checking your vital signs. You may be quite sleepy and irritable and may not remember the immediate recovery period. This tiredness may continue for much of the day. You will have a sore throat and the nursing staff will adjust your pain medication accordingly. The anesthesia may also cause you to feel nauseated. Within 24 hours, your nausea should resolve.

### **What other things should I expect at home after the operation?**



**Throat Pain:** You may anticipate 7-10 days of a persistent sore throat that is worse with swallowing. Management of your throat is best controlled by pain medications such as Tylenol with Codeine or Lortab™ Elixir (Hydrocodone). After the first few days the discomfort should begin to resolve.

**Often times between days 2-5 there may be a sudden increase in pain as the dissolvable stitches in the back of the throat begin to loosen and open up.** By

the second week you should have a significant improvement in your pain and by the third week you should have minimal discomfort. See below for more strategies in managing throat pain.

**Fever:** Low-grade fevers (<100.5° F) are acceptable after surgery. It is important to take plenty of fluids during this period to prevent dehydration.

#### **Difficulty Swallowing and Fluids Coming Out of Your Nose:**

One of the functions of the soft palate is to prevent food from being misdirected up into your nose. Having a procedure on your palate causes incoordination of your swallowing reflexes resulting in food (primarily liquids) to potentially come out through your nose. This is a normal response with your first swallow and typically resolves

within the first few days to weeks. You should always take small sips and swallow slowly in order to “retrain” your reflexes.

- ▶ **Mucous and Phlegm in the Back of the Throat:** One the consequences of having difficulty swallowing is that you may “bulld up” mucous in the back of your throat. Frequent sips of water may manage this discomfort or you can use over the counter medication that contains guaifenesin such as Mucinex™ to thin your secretions. This issue resolves within the first few days but may last weeks.
- ▶ **Ear Pain:** Often you may have ear pain. This pain is **not** from your ears but referred pain from your throat. The same nerve that innervates (connects to) your throat also innervates (connects to) your ear. Your brain may perceive your throat pain as ear pain.
- ▶ **Foreign Body Sensation in the Throat:** The stitches and the scar that is formed from the operation may cause a foreign body sensation at the surgical site. This is normal and should resolve as you recover. Occasssionally, the irritation caused by the scar of the arch in the palate may take months to resolve.
- ▶ **Bad Breath:** After surgery, the back of the throat will be covered with a white coat (exudate) that may cause bad breath for up to 12 days. There will be some redness and swelling as well.
- ▶ **Continued Snoring:** Even after your surgery you may initially still have snoring and gasping at night. This should subside after the swelling is reduced.

## What medicines will I be given after my operation?

When you are discharged after the operation Dr. Pasha will provide you with two prescriptions: liquid pain medication and liquid antibiotics.



**Pain medication** will be given in liquid form. Dr. Pasha typically prescribes Hydrocodone (Lortab™) elixir. See below on how to manage postoperative pain.

**Antibiotics** must be taken for the full course. Antibiotics prevent infection and allow you to heal better. If you miss a dose or two you should not be alarmed and continue with your scheduled dosing

without taking any extra medication to “make up for it.” If you develop a rash stop the medication immediately and call Dr. Pasha.

**Do not take any aspirin, anti-inflammatory products, or blood thinners unless instructed by Dr. Pasha for two weeks.** - They may increase the chance of bleeding.

*NOTE for Females using Birth Control: some antibiotics and pain medications may neutralize the therapeutic effect of birth control pills allowing for conception and resulting in pregnancy. Alternative forms of birth control should be utilized.*

### **What can I eat after the surgery?**

Before you leave the hospital or surgery center, the nurses will make sure you are able to tolerate liquids. When you go home you may advance your diet to include soft foods (e.g., sherbet, popsicles, ice cream, milk shakes, or juices) for two weeks and avoid foods that are hard and may cause bleeding. Do not worry about calorie intake. Your body has plenty of reserves. If you are not your ideal weight, this recovery period will be good time to lose 10-15 pounds to jump-start your weight loss program!!

### **How important is fluid after my operation?**

The most important postoperative instruction is to **keep up with your fluid intake!!** Dehydration causes discomfort and more throat pain. After your operation, your body will naturally fall into a “sick state” and you will not perceive thirst so you will not feel that you are behind in fluid intake. Secondly, swallowing liquids may be uncomfortable which may deter you to drink. It is essential that you drink much more than you feel you need. The average person needs **2 liters** of fluids everyday. As you recover you may have a low-grade fever, which will require you to have more fluids.



You should drink more than just water. It is typical that you will eat very little. Your body has plenty of calorie reserves. However, your body needs to maintain fluids and **electrolytes**. Water does not have electrolytes, so you should drink other fluids such as juices, electrolyte drinks (Gatorade™ or Pedialyte™), or dairy drinks. For some, acidic or citrus products such as orange juice may irritate the throat.

### **How much pain and discomfort will I be in?**

Pain and discomfort is a subjective complaint that varies from patient to patient. There are many determinants of how much pain you will have after a procedure or surgery. In our experience, any throat procedure that requires removal of the tonsils or trimming of the palate results in throat discomfort that can last from 1-3 weeks. The amount and length of pain is often difficult to assess. Some determinants of postoperative pain include how deep are the tonsils or how much soft palate was removed. Other factors include how any individual may perceive pain. Some have a high tolerance to pain while others are more sensitive.

### **When will the pain go away?**

A typical patient will have pain requiring pain medications consistently for 7-10 days (sometimes there may be an increase in pain after a few days as the stitches "loosen up"). The second week is usually a period of recovery where "everyday is a better day." During this period you may be taking pain medications on a sporadic basis or perhaps only at night. The third week is more of a soreness or irritation, which may be more focused on a particular area or side. Complete resolution should be anticipated around the third week. Complete healing occurs when the back of the throat has no "white" areas with only pink normal mucosa.



## What are the first steps in dealing with pain?

First and foremost you should understand the pain medications you were prescribed. Generally, Dr. Pasha prescribes a liquid medication called Hydrocodone (Lortab™). If you have a sensitivity or allergy to pain medications you may be prescribed something different. This narcotic is the equivalent of Vicodin™ and is the strongest medication that Dr. Pasha can prescribe. Initially, we recommend that you take your medication “around the clock” every four hours to stay ahead of the pain at least for the first few days (for Hydrocodone elixir that would be 1-2 teaspoons for a normal weighted person). After the first few days, you can adjust the schedule to an as needed basis. Please note that pain medications **do NOT** necessarily eliminate discomfort completely but rather reduce the pain to a more tolerable level.

## What if That Doesn't Work?

The second step is to take ½ the dose ½ the time (for hydrocodone elixir that would be 1 teaspoon every two hours for a normal weighted person). Additionally, you should make sure that you are well hydrated as dehydration causes mucosal dryness and **worsens** soreness.

## It still hurts!

Sometimes after throat surgery home pain medications just do not help. If this is the case for you **please** call Dr. Pasha to arrange for admission at the hospital. One would be amazed on well you may feel after having intravenous fluids, stronger pain medications, and a good night's rest. Do not be discouraged or feel defeated as pain is perceived differently by each individual.

## What Should I Watch Out for with Pain Medications?



Always watch your dosing! Do not take more than you were prescribed as an overdose can cause respiratory distress **especially** those of you who have sleep apnea!

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**Nausea** is an extremely common side effect for pain medications. If this occurs call Dr. Pasha's office to see if you can change your medications.

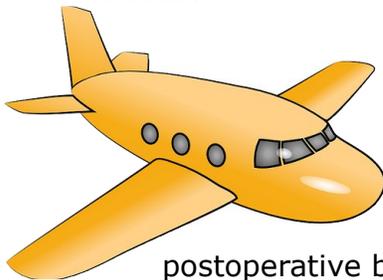
**Constipation** is a common cause of long-term narcotic use. If you have not had a bowel movement in 4 days then you should obtain an over-the-counter stool softener such as Colace™. Despite not having full meals, you should still have bowel movements. If the over-the-counter medication does not work Dr. Pasha may have to prescribe a suppository or an enema in order to prevent further problems.

Do **not** drive, operate heavy machinery, climb heights, or make important decisions which on narcotics.

Finally there are many other potential side effects with all prescription drugs and you should refer to the information provided by your pharmacist for a complete listing.

### **What other things should I do to help healing and reduce any discomfort?**

- Dr. Pasha recommends a **cool-mist steam humidifier** for 15 minutes every 6 hours during the day for the first week and during sleep for the first 4 weeks. Steam Inhalers are available at drug stores. A humidifier at bedside moistens the nose and throat (reduces throat discomfort from mouth breathing).
- Dr. Pasha also advises that you keep your head above your heart at night (two pillows) to reduce blood flow to the throat for the next few weeks.



### **When can I travel?**

Ideally, you should avoid any long travels for at least two weeks after you surgery unless cleared by Dr. Pasha. You have the potential to have postoperative bleeding that may require Dr. Pasha's attention.

### **What other restrictions will I have after the operation?**

- You should avoid **any straining or vigorous activity** including bending over, lifting heavy weights, and most sports for at least **two weeks**.
- You may return to work or school whenever comfortable; a week is average but returning to work after two weeks is not unusual.



- Baths and showers are acceptable at any time.
- Smoking decreases healing effectiveness and increases complications. If you're a smoker, this would be a good time to try to stop smoking. Please contact your primary care doctor on techniques and possible aids to help you quit smoking.

### **The back of my throat looks white is this normal?**

There will be several stages that the back of your throat will go through as it heals:

1. **Dark Gray/Black:** for the first few days you will see a dark film around your tonsillar area.
2. **White/Yellow:** as your throat forms a scab it will appear white (this often is confused as an infection). During this period you are at risk of mild bleeding and secondary bleeds if the scab falls off.
3. **Pink:** the last stage of healing is the normal pink color like the rest of the lining of your mouth. This typically occurs at 2-3 weeks. At this stage you may resume a normal diet including hard foods.

### **What About the Stitches?**

Dr. Pasha uses absorbable (dissolvable) stitches to reconstruct the soft palate region and close the gap from removing the tonsils. These stitches will loosen up after a few days (causing an increase in throat pain). The stitches will dissolve on their own between 4-6 weeks. Typically you will not notice the stitches dissolving as you may swallow them unknowingly. If after a few weeks the stitches become too irritating, schedule an appointment to have the stitches removed.

### **Will I feel or see my Pillar implants?**

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If you received pillar implants, you should not be able to see the implants. The implants are placed into the deep layers of the soft palate.

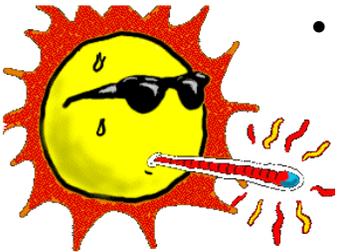
### **When do I return to clinic for follow-up?**

Schedule an appointment with Dr. Pasha within 14 days after the operation (7 days if you also had a nasal operation to have your splints removed). It is your responsibility to schedule and keep your appointment.

### **When should I call the office?**

Dr. Pasha may be reached for emergencies at any time. Please contact the office or report to the emergency room if any of the following occur:

- **Bleeding:** Significant bleeding is rare. You should anticipate some mild sporadic "blood streaked secretions" for up a few days. If you start to bleed from your mouth, begin with **gargling with ice-cold water**. The cold causes the blood vessels to constrict, stopping the bleeding. If this does not control the bleeding after 10 minutes then call Dr. Pasha for further instructions. You may need to return to the office or the operating room to cauterize the bleeding spot. Vomiting old clotted blood may also occur within the first day, if the vomiting persists then you should also contact the office.
- **Dehydration:** If you cannot tolerate liquids for 24 hours, notify Dr. Pasha. Signs of dehydration include lethargy and reduced or very concentrated urine.
- **High Fever:** Temperatures greater than 101° F, or when accompanied by cough or difficulty breathing, should be reported.
- **Difficulty Breathing:** If you have any difficulty breathing, notify Dr. Pasha and report to the emergency room.
- **Extrusions:** If you had Pillar implants, they are located on the roof of your mouth. Occasionally these implants may slowly come out and you may begin to feel or see the implant in the back of your throat. If this occurs do not worry, notify Dr. Pasha's office to schedule an appointment so that the implant can be removed and possibly be replaced.



## When will I notice a change in my snoring and sleep?

Maximum therapeutic benefit typically occurs after 4-6 weeks when the swelling has reduced. If you had Pillar implants placed, it takes 4-6 weeks to form a scar to stiffen the soft palate. Nonetheless, many patients notice a significant decrease in snoring within a few days.

## I still snore?



If after 4-6 weeks you are still snoring, please schedule an appointment with Dr. Pasha to discuss the potential reasons of your snoring.

The most common reason for continued snoring is **mouth breathing** at night. When this occurs you may not have a “palatal” snore but vibrations that occur deep in the larynx (throat). Breathing through your mouth out of habit most often causes this type of snore. This habit may be broken through several techniques including using light tape on the mouth at night to remind you to keep your mouth closed (do not use heavy or duct tape to close your mouth!). Another technique is simply placing a scarf, long sock, or chin guard to keep your mouth closed. Lastly, mouth guards may be used. Typically, it may take 2-3 weeks of “training” your body to keep its mouth closed.

If you have **gained weight** or perhaps have not lost weight (if you are not at your ideal weight), you may snore from the excess tissue around your neck area in the deeper parts of your throat causing vibrations at night. Approaching your ideal weight is essential in achieving the maximal therapeutic benefit. The only resolution to snoring caused by excess weight around the throat and neck area is weight loss.

If you begin to snore again after several months or years later, you may have developed an unfavorable **scar**. Scar formation is largely unpredictable. Occasionally, scarring may contract in a way that may promote snoring. If this unfortunate complication occurs you may require a revision procedure.

Lastly, there is an uncommon condition in which you may snore with your mouth closed and the vibrations come from the back of your nose. This type of snoring is difficult to deal with and may require revisiting your nasal cavity for allergies, septal deflections, and enlarged turbinates.



**713-523-8800**