Peripheral Bypass Surgery

Your surgeon has arranged for you to have surgery. This pamphlet will help you learn about your operation.

Normal artery: blood flows through easily

The arteries provide all of the body’s tissues with blood that is rich in oxygen. The tissues will not get enough oxygen-rich blood if an artery becomes narrowed. This could mean the loss of a limb. Your surgery should improve the circulation in your leg by letting the blood go around the blockage. The graft material used to bypass your blockage may be a vein taken from your own leg. Man-made material may be used when a vein is not available. Your surgeon will talk with you about the type of surgery and graft that is best for you.

Narrowed artery: blood does not flow through easily
After surgery

- If you are having any pain, ask the nurse for medication.

- The nurse will be checking the pulse in your foot often.

- The intravenous (IV) will be stopped once you are drinking well and your IV antibiotics are stopped.

- Wiggle your toes often to help the flow of blood. As you get stronger, you will be spending more time out of bed, walking short distances, and gradually increasing your activity. A walker may be helpful the first time you are up. Although you may have some discomfort, it is important that you put some weight on the leg that had surgery. Increase
your activity until it includes a few walks in the hall each day.

- Your bowels may not move for a few days after surgery. This is normal. Ask for a laxative if needed.

- Your foot may feel very warm. This will go away bit by bit. The temperature of your foot will return to normal in 7-10 days.

- You can expect some swelling of the leg. This will go away bit by bit over weeks or months. Elevate (raise up) the leg if swelling is a problem. Your leg may never return to the size it was before the operation. A support stocking may be helpful.

- Try not to sleep with your leg bent. The leg that had surgery may be wrapped with an elastic bandage before you get up in the morning. This bandage is to be taken off when you go to bed. Do not bend at the waist. Ask your nurse for help.

- It’s OK to lie down or walk to keep your legs straight. Do not sit with your legs bent.

- Do not cross your legs.
At home

Medication

• Take medication as ordered by your doctor. Medications will be reviewed with you before you go home.

• Do not drink alcohol or drive a car while taking pain pills.

Care of the incision

• A light bandage may cover your incision (cut) after the first bandage is removed.

• You may or may not have staples. If you do, they will be taken out about 7-10 days after surgery. You will be given a time to visit either your family doctor or surgeon.

• If Steri-Strips™ (pieces of special tape) are placed on the incision, they can be peeled off as they get loose. This will be about 7-10 days after your operation.

• You may shower 1 week after surgery if the incision(s) is healing well and there is no drainage. Pat dry. You may have a tub bath when the incision is completely healed.

• Some bruising is normal and will disappear in a few weeks.
Activity

• Slowly increase activity at home.

• Do not sit for long periods with your knees and hips bent.

• Walking is very important.

• Avoid vacuuming, lifting anything over 5 pounds, straining, and strenuous activities such as sports for 6-8 weeks after your operation, unless told otherwise by your doctor.

• How soon you are able to return to work will depend on your type of work as well as your general health and recovery.

• You may drive your car in 4-6 weeks. Talk about this with your doctor when you return for your follow-up appointment.

• You may resume sexual activity (sex) if you feel well enough. Men may not be able to keep an erection because of reduced blood flow. If you have any concerns, talk to your doctor.
Bowel care

• Pain medication, less activity, and diet can cause constipation.
• Drink 8-10 glasses of water a day unless you are not allowed to because of another health problem.
• Try to eat foods high in fibre (bran cereals, whole wheat bread, fruit, and vegetables).
• Ask your doctor about using laxatives or stool softeners if you need them.

Tell your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

• Incision problems:
  › Redness, swelling, or warmth around the incision
  › Drainage from the incision
  › Separation of the edges of the incision
  › Increasing pain or soreness around the incision
• Fever and/or chills
• Constant pain
• Numbness in your leg
• Coldness or loss of strength in your leg
• Your leg is pale in colour
A healthy lifestyle
Surgery is only part of your treatment. A healthy lifestyle is also very important.

Stop smoking
It is important that you do not smoke. Smoking will cause further damage to your arteries. This may mean you need more surgery and even an amputation. If you need help to stop smoking, talk to your nurse or doctor.

Eat healthy food
• It may take awhile for your appetite to return to normal. During this time, it will help to eat smaller meals more often. Eating healthy meals will help you to regain your strength.
• Choose food low in fat to prevent a buildup of materials in your arteries.
• Ask to speak with a dietitian if you need help with planning meals.
• Keep a healthy weight.

Be active
• Exercise helps with weight loss.
• Exercise improves blood flow.
• Exercise helps keep your blood sugar and blood pressure under control.
Control diabetes
• Follow your meal plan.
• Check your blood sugar regularly.
• See your doctor regularly.
• Take your pills or insulin as ordered by your doctor.

Control your blood pressure
• Have your blood pressure checked regularly.
• Take the medication as ordered by your doctor. If you stop your medications, your blood pressure will rise again.
• Reduce stress.

Reduce stress
• Exercise more.
• Get plenty of sleep.
• Talk to others about your problems.

Follow-up visits to your doctor
• It is important that you return to see your surgeon when he or she suggests.
• You will be given an appointment before you leave the hospital.
Write down any questions you wish to ask your doctor.
Looking for more health information?
This pamphlet and all our active patient pamphlets are searchable here:
http://library.cdha.nshealth.ca/chlibrary/Pamphlets
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
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