Your Care at Home After a Mastoidectomy

What is a Mastoidectomy?
A mastoidectomy is a surgery done on the temporal bone structures to remove the parts with chronic disease. This can also be done to gain access to problems deeper in the ear and skull.

What to Expect after Surgery

- You may feel some incision pain, ear pressure or headache. For relief, use your pain medicine as directed.
- Because your jaw is close to your ear, you may have soreness or stiffness when you move your jaw. You may want to start with soft foods.
- You may have some incision area numbness which may last for months.
- You will have an incision behind or above the affected ear.
- You will have a large cup like dressing over the affected ear and incision. Your doctor will tell you when it may be removed. After the gauze dressing is off, wear a cotton ball in the bowl of your ear. This may be changed as needed.
- You may have packing inside your ear canal. The packing may dissolve or it will be removed at your first clinic visit after surgery. Dissolvable packing may look dark red or black on your cotton ball, this is normal.
- You may hear some popping or crackling noises. This is normal.
- There may be blood-stained drainage from your ear for a few days. Some drainage may last for 1-2 weeks. If you have had a “canal wall down” procedure you may have more drainage from your ear for up to 3 months.
- Some people feel dizzy. This usually will last only for about a week or so.
- You may have some taste changes when eating.
- The presence of the dressing, any packing, or swelling may make it harder to hear. Often, best hearing may not be achieved for 3-6 months.

What to Do After Surgery

- If you have a Velcro type headband holding your dressing in place, it should be left in place the first night after surgery, but it is OK to loosen the band and reattach it if it feels too tight.
- The incision behind your ear can get wet after two days, but you must keep water out of your ear until advised by your doctor. This may be for 1-3 months. When you shower, put a Vaseline® covered cotton ball in the bowl of your ear to seal the canal and keep your ear canal dry.
- Use ear drops as directed by your doctor.
- If you have packing inside your ear canal, do not remove it. You may notice some packing material on the cotton ball when you change it.
• For the next 48 hours, raise your head at least 30° when you lie down. Use at least 2 pillows. Do not lie on the side of your treated ear.
• Avoid quick head movements.
• Avoid strenuous activity for 4 weeks or as your doctor advises. No jogging, aerobics, or lifting greater than 25 pounds during that time. No swimming for at least 2 months or until your doctor advises.
• Do not blow your nose for 1 week. After 1 week, if you must blow your nose, do it gently one side at a time to avoid pressure on your ears.
• For the first week, sneeze or cough only with your mouth open.
• Check with your doctor about air travel. It is often about 4-6 weeks before you will be able to travel by air.
• Check your wound for any signs of infection. Watch for redness, swelling, increased pain or foul smelling pus-like drainage.
• Do not drive or drink alcohol while taking any pain pills.

When to Call Your Doctor
• Bleeding that soaks through 6 gauze dressings or cotton balls in one hour
• Fever greater than 100.5° F by mouth
• Pain that is not relieved by medication
• Any signs of infection
• Sudden dizzy feeling
• A large decrease in your hearing
• Weakness of the face or facial droop

Phone Numbers

ENT Clinic: (608) 263-6190 Monday - Friday, 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

After 5:00 pm or weekends, and holidays, the clinic number will be answered by the paging operator. Ask for the ENT doctor on-call. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back shortly.

If you live out of the area, please call: 1-800-323-8942.

The Spanish version of this Health Facts for You is #4850s.