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Post-Op Instructions for Facelift Surgery

The facelift operation is one of the most dramatic procedures for looking younger. Nothing can improve the jowl and neck more than the facelift. In order to take advantage of all the positive changes associated with the facelift the patient must pay close attention to the recovery process.

Activity: For the first 24 hours, rest is absolutely necessary. Elevate the head and talk as little as possible. Sleep in a recliner if possible or with your head on several pillows. Do not sleep on the side of your face but rather sleep with the back of your head on the pillow for about two weeks. Some patients prefer an airline type pillow for comfort. Also popular is the common pillow called a "husband." This is the large pillow that has extensions that go under the arms and supports the patient. Some people use these types of pillows to watch TV in bed, etc.

Dressings: Dr. Niamtu has discontinued using standard bulky dressings with facelifts. We have found that most patients actually do better without any dressing. Patients are more comfortable without dressings and families members also have less anxiety without large dressings. Dr. Niamtu will put a small gauze wrap that looks like a turtle neck and this be removed the next day.

For the first week, put an antibiotic ointment (polysporin) around the ear incisions. This will keep the incisions moist and avoid scabs from forming. Make sure you are cleaning behind the ears and have your caregiver look behind your ear to double check. We don't want you scrubbing with a wash cloth, but can use hydrogen peroxide to break up the scabs or "build-up" back there and reapply antibiotic ointment.

You may shower after 48 hours, gently washing the hair with a mild shampoo. Use a good conditioner to rid the hair of tangles. The hair is likely to be more tangled more than usual due to bits of blood clinging to the hair. Also you may see some hair come out during the shower. This is not hair loss, but rather hairs that were cut during the surgery. Brushing and blow-drying the hair is allowed if performed carefully. The blow dryer should be set on low heat. Remember that the scalp and face may be numb in certain areas and in this unprotected state could be inadvertently burned. Staples are also frequently used in the hairline behind the ear, so be careful not to catch them when combing. Hair coloring and permanents should be avoided until three weeks from the time the sutures are removed.

How I look and feel: Patients that undergo facelift surgery (especially when performed with multiple other procedures) are likely to swell and bruise. Sometimes this swelling can be significant for several days. Most people need someone to assist them at least the night of their surgery, so it is imperative to line up a care giver for several days. If a bandage was placed

after surgery, this will prevent swelling in some areas, but increase it around the face. Don't be alarmed when the dressing is removed and the face is swollen, this goes down quickly.

Some patients bruise immediately and can have noticeable bruising on the neck and around the mouth or eyes. This can begin as purple and will fade to yellow and disappear. The sides of the neck also frequently swell immediately after surgery and may look distorted. This will resolve without problem in several days.

For the first week after facelift surgery your face and neck will feel very tight and this is normal. It may also be difficult to open your mouth for the first several days. Do not force head turning or mouth opening or it could tear stitches. Avoid any extreme movements of the face, neck and mouth.

Numbness is very common with most facelift procedures and will resolve naturally over the upcoming weeks. Permanent numbness is very rare.

Postoperative Office Visits: Schedule your first postoperative visit for 24 hours, the second visit for 7 days after your operation. Your next visit will be a week later, when the rest of your stitches and/or staples will be taken out. Dr. Niamtu will then want to see you again two to three weeks later, then as needed. Please bring a scarf or hat to the first post-op visit as you will be having a bad hair day!

Driving: This should not be resumed until it is comfortable to move the head about without any restrictions from pain or swelling.

Exercise: During the first postoperative week, activity should be kept to a minimum - only what is necessary to take care of oneself. There should be no strenuous activity this first week as this may increase facial swelling and compromise the final result. Over the following two weeks exercise may be gradually increased. Walking is a superb way of getting exercise and not jeopardizing the operation. You should absolutely not perform exercises that require severe turning of the head such as golf, rowing, and aerobics for at least 4 weeks after your surgery. These extreme stretching movements can tear the sutures that are supporting the lift. After 4-6 weeks, the areas are fully healed and normal activity can be resumed. Judgment, however, must be used. Not all patients heal alike.

Scars: Facelift scars generally heal in an excellent manner but they look worse before they look better. In other words your scars will go through multiple stages of healing and at times look better or worse. We take big steps to place the scars in the most hidden areas and spend a lot of time using plastic closure techniques to insure the best scars. Most of the time they heal adequately by themselves but occasionally Dr. Niamtu will perform minor revision or laser of the scars to improve their appearance.

If any part of the convalescence is confusing, please call the office at 934-3223. Dr. Niamtu is available 24 hours a day by cell phone at 347-3504.