

## Head and Neck Surgical Drain Care

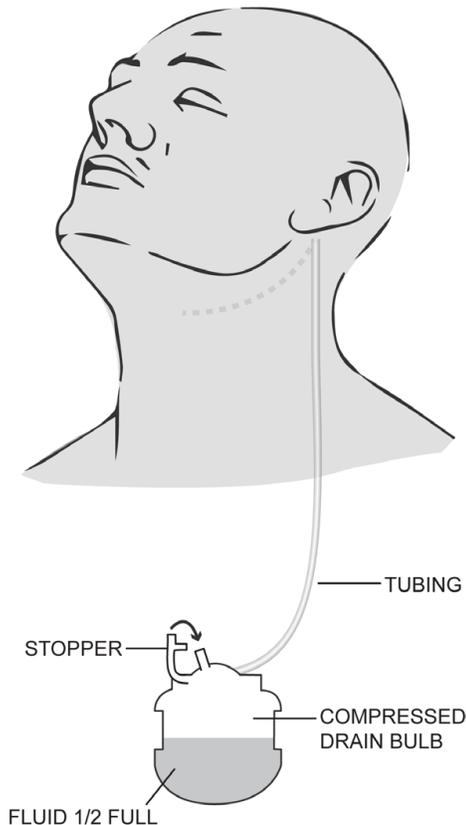
This factsheet tells how to take care of your surgical drain after you go home from the hospital.

### About Your Surgical Drain

During your surgery, your doctors put a drain in your wound. It helps your body to do these things:

- Keep fluid from collecting in the wound
- Heal faster
- Lower your risk of infection

This drain also lets your care team check to make sure your wound is healing well.



*Drain location for head and neck surgeries.*

Fluid from your wound goes through a tube to the drain bulb. The fluid is usually red to light pink. This is normal. As you heal, the red color gets lighter.

You may feel some burning and pulling from the stitch that hold the tube in place. This is normal.

### You Are Part of Your Care Team

It is important to follow these care instructions. Proper care lowers your risk of getting an infection. It also helps keep the time you will need the drain as short as possible.

### How Do I Care for the Drain at Home?

- Avoid sleeping on the side of your body with the drain.
- Pin the tube and bulb inside your clothing. This will keep the drain from pulling out.
- You can shower while the drain is in place. Tape plastic wrap over the area where the tube comes out.
- Keep the drain and stitches as dry as possible. Do not let the drain go under water. Do not take baths or soak in a hot tub while the drain is in place.
- If the area around your drain gets wet, pat it dry with a clean paper towel. Do not rub.
- You do not need a bandage over the drain. If the wound leaks a little, you can use a bandaid or gauze and tape.

Your care team showed you how to strip and empty the drain while you were in the hospital. If you need a reminder, you can watch a video about taking care of your drain here: <http://bit.ly/2gMvg85>

### How Do I Strip the Drain?

At home, you need to strip the drain 3 times a day. This keeps your drain flowing properly. Follow these steps:

1. Wash and dry your hands.
2. Open an alcohol swab and set it aside on a clean surface.
3. With one hand, hold the tubing where it comes out of your skin.
4. With your other hand, pick up the alcohol swab, folded in half between your thumb and first finger. Pinch the tubing between the two layers of the swab. Start near where the tubing comes out of your skin.
5. Slowly and firmly pull your thumb and first finger down the tubing to the drain bulb.
6. If the pulling hurts, stop. Begin again more gently.

## How Do I Empty the Drain?

Empty the drain bulb when it is  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  full. Empty it at least twice a day—more often if needed. Follow these steps:

1. Wash and dry your hands.
2. Strip the drain.
3. Lift the stopper on the drain bulb.
4. Empty the fluid into the measuring cup you got from the hospital. Use this cup only for measuring the fluid.
5. Squeeze the drain bulb until it is pressed almost flat. You will hear air coming out.
6. Put the stopper back into the flat drain bulb while squeezing the bulb.
7. Write down the amount of fluid each time you empty the drain. Also write the date and time. Share this information with your care team during your next visit or over the phone.
8. Flush the fluid down the toilet after you measure it. Rinse the measuring cup with warm water.
9. Wash and dry your hands.

Your care team will take out the drain when, for two days in a row, less than 50ml of fluid drains in a day. This usually happens a few days after your surgery. Call your care team if your drain has been in place longer than 2 weeks.

## When to Call for Help

If any of these things happen, call your care team right away:

- Swelling of your neck or around the tube gets worse.
- You have new pain or more pain around the tube.
- You measure greater than 100ml more fluid draining than the day before.
- Fluid in the bulb changes to milky white.
- Fluid in the bulb changes from light pink to dark red.
- Fluid from the bulb smells bad.
- The tube falls out or breaks.

## Other problems

- You have a fever of 100.4F (38C) or higher.

- You are vomiting.
- Your wound is not healing.
- The stitches come loose or your wound opens.

**If you start having a hard time breathing, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.**

## Call Your Care Team

Call us at 801-587-4566 or message us through MyChart.