

Wide Local Excision

What is a wide local excision?

A **wide local excision** is a surgery which involves using a scalpel (a sharp knife) to cut out a tumor or other abnormal tissue, along with some normal tissue around it. We want to cut with this wide margin (extra space), because cancer often spreads out from the tumor. Getting a wide area around the cancer we can see ensures we are more likely to remove all the cancerous tissue.

What is a bolster?

At the time of your surgery, your surgeon may use a type of wound dressing called a bolster. A **bolster** is a dressing that is sewn on top of a skin graft. This dressing must stay in place until your follow-up visit in clinic 7-10 days after surgery. A doctor or a nurse will then remove the bolster. **Do not try to remove the bolster yourself for any reason.**

A bolster has 2 functions:

- It holds the skin graft in place to prevent movement of the graft on the underlying tissues. This allows your body's blood supply to work into the graft.
- One cause of skin graft failure is the possibility of blood or fluid collecting beneath the graft, which raises the graft from the underlying tissues and prevents your body from restoring blood flow to the area. The bolster is important to prevent fluid from collecting between the underlying tissue and the graft, because it applies enough pressure to prevent fluid build-up but not so much that it will prevent the blood supply (circulation).

While we usually allow patients to shower after surgery, make sure to keep the bolster dry at all times.

What should I expect after my wide local excision?

Patients usually have one area to take care of after surgery, but there may be more depending on the surgical plan. The main site may look like one of the following:

- You may have a bolster or Vaseline[®]-soaked gauze stitched in place, either with or without a bigger foam pad stapled on top.
- You may have a simple, straight line cut that is stitched closed.
- For more complicated areas of the face, we may use a **rotational flap**. This is when we cut surrounding skin in such a way that we can rotate it to fill the space left when we cut out the cancer. This helps create a better contour (curved shape) of the skin and incision.

What symptoms can I expect to have after surgery?

- Some pain and bruising
- Some bleeding from the main surgical site, especially if you had a skin graft and if you were on blood thinners
 - If this happens, put pressure on the bleeding site for 15 minutes. If it continues to bleed, call our office or come to the emergency room (ER).
- Some patients who also have a lymph node biopsy as part of their wide local excision develop a small bump of fluid build-up at the site. This usually does not bother patients too much and resolves on its own a few weeks after surgery. Contact the clinic if the bump lasts longer than this, becomes painful or red, or becomes larger than a golf ball.

What symptoms should I be concerned about?

Call the clinic if you have any of these symptoms after surgery:

- Heavy bleeding (more than a cupful over an hour) or uncontrolled bleeding
- Signs of infection, which may include:
 - An increase in the swelling or redness near the area of the surgery
 - The skin around the incision becomes hot to the touch
 - Thick green or yellow fluid leaking from the wound, which may be pus
 - A bad smell around the wound
 - A fever higher than 101° F
 - Increasing pain

Call 911 immediately if you have shortness of breath or any chest pain.

What follow-up care will I have?

We need to see you back in the office about 1-3 weeks after surgery, so we can check on your recovery and remove any non-dissolvable stitches. Depending on the results of your surgery, we may recommend another surgery, a referral to another doctor (such as a medical oncologist), or routine follow-up. If you have not heard from our office about your surgery report after 10 days, call the office to check on your results.

Remember that healing from surgery takes time. Be patient and give yourself permission to relax for 1-2 weeks after surgery.

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

- On Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, you can call the Otolaryngology nurse at (734) 936-8027.
- After hours, you can call (734) 936-6267. Ask the operator to page the ENT doctor, or otolaryngologist, on call.

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