

# Sympathectomy Surgery



UHN

## Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

- how to prepare for your surgery
- what to expect while in hospital
- what to expect after you return home
- who to call if you have any questions

### Your surgery has been scheduled for:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Come to the hospital at: \_\_\_\_\_

You can expect to stay in the hospital for about:

\_\_\_\_\_

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Author: Susan Walker RN, MN-APN, Gina Bryden RN, B.A, MAEd and Thoracic Surgery team  
Revision by Marijana Zubrinic RN (EC), MScN, NP-PHC  
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## Preparing for your surgery

### What is the surgery am I having?

You are having a **sympathectomy**. This surgery is done to help people who have heavy sweating (a condition called hyperhidrosis). It is also done to control some kinds of chronic pain.

### What happens during the surgery?

During the sympathectomy, the surgeon cuts or “clips” the nerves deep inside the chest with special staples.

Your surgeon will do this surgery using a special video camera. This type of surgery is called video-assisted thoracic surgery (VATS). During VATS, the surgeon makes small incisions (cuts) on the side of your chest near your armpits. He/she uses a small camera during the procedure to help see inside your body while doing the surgery. The camera sends pictures to a screen. This helps the surgeon to see inside of your body.

### How long will I need to stay in the hospital?

**Most patients go home the same day as surgery. You may need to stay in the hospital overnight for observation.** If you stay overnight, the team will check on you in the morning. They will let you know during rounds if it is safe for you to go home.

Before coming to the hospital, plan to have someone pick you up when you are ready to go home after surgery.

### Can the time for my surgery change?

Yes. We will do our best to do your surgery at the scheduled time. But, we may need to reschedule your surgery if other emergencies come up.

## My hospital stay

### Where will I go after surgery?

You will stay in the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) for a 1 hour. Once you are awake and stable, we will take you to the ward.

You will stay on the ward until you are discharged. If you are going home the same day, you will be taken to the Same Day Discharge (SDD) unit. The nurses will help you get ready to go home in the SDD Unit.

### What can I expect after surgery?

Your nurse will check your:

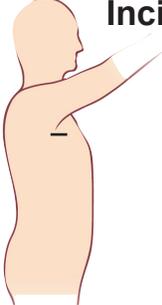
- blood pressure
- pulse
- temperature
- heart
- breathing
- oxygen level

You can get up and walk around once you are fully awake.

You will be able to eat and drink once you are fully awake.

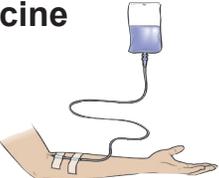
## What can I expect to have on my body?

After your surgery, you will have:

 <p><b>Incisions</b></p>	<p>You will have an incision on the side of your chest under near your armpits. The incision will be 5 mm long.</p> <p>Your surgeon will use dissolvable stitches to close the incision. This means the stitches will go away on their own.</p>
 <p><b>Intravenous (IV)</b></p>	<p>You will have an IV line. We will use it to give you fluids and medicine.</p> <p>The IV will stay in until you are drinking well.</p>
 <p><b>Oxygen</b></p>	<p>You may need oxygen after your surgery. You get the oxygen either by facemask or through your nose (nasal prongs).</p> <p>We remove the oxygen once your lungs are working well enough.</p>

## How can I manage my pain?

We will work with you to manage your pain. We can give you pain medicine in different ways. These include:

 <p><b>Intravenous (IV) medicine</b></p>	<p>You will get your pain medicine through an IV.</p> <p>Let your nurse know when you have pain so they can give you the pain medicine. Let your nurse know if the pain isn't going away after getting medicine.</p>
 <p><b>Medicine by mouth</b></p>	<p>You may get your pain medicine in tablets that you swallow. This will happen once you are drinking fluids. Let your nurse know when you have pain, so they can give you the pain medicine.</p>

## Going home

During your hospital stay, we will help you get ready to go home.

### Bowel upset

Constipation (having trouble using the bathroom) can happen when you take pain medicine. To prevent constipation:

- Drink plenty of fluids (at least 6 cups a day unless your doctor or dietitian gives you different instructions).
- Add bran, high fibre breads and cereals, berries, dried fruit or prune juice to your diet (unless your doctor or dietitian gives you different instructions).
- Your doctor will prescribe you a stool softener while you are taking the pain medicine. You may also use a mild laxative if you need one. If you still have problems, see your family doctor.

### What instructions do I follow once I am home?

#### Activity

You can gradually increase your activity when you get home. Walk at least once a day if you can.



#### Incisions

- You don't have to cover your incisions. If your clothes are rubbing on your incisions, you can cover them with clean gauze.
- Do not put lotions or creams on your incisions until they are completely healed.
- Most of your pain should be gone by 4 weeks after your surgery.
- There may be a bump along the incisions. It will get smaller in 4 to 6 weeks.
- The area around your incisions may feel numb. This is normal. Normally this goes away after surgery. For some people it may last for several months or may not go away at all. The numbness may be worse on cold or wet days. It usually gets better with time.



## **Showering or bathing**

You can shower once you get home. You should shower every day.

- Use a mild soap.
- Let the water run over your incisions.
- Pat the incisions dry with a towel.



## **Returning to work**

You will be off work for a couple of days. Depending on your job, you may need to be off longer. Ask your surgeon when it's safe for you to return to work.



## **Driving**

Do not drive until you stop taking your pain medicine. The pain medicine you are taking may make you drowsy.

You must be able to fully move your arms and legs before you can safely steer a car.



## **Lifting**

No heavy lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling for 2 or 3 weeks. This includes no vacuuming, carrying heavy groceries, or shoveling snow, for example.

You may lift up to 5 kilograms (10 pounds). Lifting more than this may open your incisions while it is healing. Your surgeon will let you know when you can start doing your everyday activities.



## **Sex**

You can start having sex whenever you feel more comfortable. Choose positions that are comfortable and won't put stress on your incisions.



## Sports

You can swim or play golf after 2 or 3 weeks.

Wait 4 to 6 weeks before you start jogging, playing tennis or racquetball, or doing aerobics.



## Travel

You can still travel after having this surgery. Please check with your surgeon if it is safe to travel right after your surgery.



## Follow-up care

Once you leave the hospital you may go to your family doctor with any problems or questions about:

- medicines
- prescriptions
- coping with pain
- sleeping
- appetite
- constipation

## My follow-up visit

We will let you know when to see your surgeon. Depending on your surgeon, your follow-up visit may be about 4 weeks after your surgery.

If you don't have an appointment for a follow up before you leave the hospital, call your surgeon's office the first week you are home.

On the day of your follow-up appointment, go to the x-ray department first to have a chest x-ray.



**Remember to bring your health card (OHIP) to your follow-up visit.**

## When should I call my surgeon?



### Call your surgeon if you:

- have new redness or swelling around your incisions
- have leaking fluid (drainage) or pus from an incision
- feel more pain than usual around an incision
- have a fever (temperature **higher** than 38.5 °C or 101 °F)
- have shortness of breath
- cough out fresh red blood

## Who can I call if I have any questions?

If you need information about the time of your surgery, tests or appointments please call your surgeon's office:

Dr. M. Cypel	☎ 416 340 5156
Dr. G. Darling	☎ 416 340 3121
Dr. M. De Perrot	☎ 416 340 5549
Dr. S. Keshavjee	☎ 416 340 4010
Dr. A. Pierre	☎ 416 340 5354
Dr. T. Waddell	☎ 416 340 3432
Dr. K. Yasufuku	☎ 416 340 4290