Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Instructions After Your Therapeutic Phlebotomy Procedure

This information explains what to do after your therapeutic phlebotomy (fleh-BAH-toh-mee) procedure.

About therapeutic phlebotomy

Therapeutic phlebotomy is a blood draw to treat a medical problem, such as having too much iron in your blood. A nurse will draw more blood with therapeutic phlebotomy than during a regular blood draw. Your doctor will decide how much blood will be drawn based on the reason you're having the procedure.

It's helpful to drink more liquids than usual before your therapeutic phlebotomy procedure if you can. Try to drink 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses of liquids for 1 day before your procedure.

What to expect during your procedure

You will sit in a chair in the treatment area for your procedure. A nurse will use a needle connected to a blood collection bag to draw a certain amount of blood. Then the nurse will remove the needle and place a pressure bandage over the needle site. A pressure bandage is a bandage that wraps around your arm. The needle site is the place on your arm where the needle was.

Instructions after your procedure

- Leave the pressure bandage on your needle site for 3 to 6 hours after your procedure.

- Avoid activities that may strain the arm used during your procedure for at least 1 day after your procedure. This includes exercise and heavy lifting.

You may feel lightheaded or dizzy after your therapeutic phlebotomy procedure. To help keep this from happening:

- Drink more liquids than usual for 1 to 2 days after your procedure. Try to drink at least 8 to 10 (8-ounce) glasses each day.
- Avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine for the rest of the day after your procedure. This includes coffee, tea, and soda.
- Avoid strenuous exercise, such as jogging, for 1 day after your procedure.
- If you smoke, do not smoke for at least 1 hour after your procedure.
- Do not take a hot bath for the rest of the day after your procedure.

If you feel lightheaded or dizzy, sit down and place your head between your knees. You can also lie down flat and raise your feet and legs slightly. For example, you can rest them on a couple of pillows.

How to care for your needle site

You may have discomfort, bleeding, swelling, or bruising at your needle site. Follow the guidelines below to help with these side effects.

Guidelines for managing discomfort

- Hold ice or a cool pack over the site for 10 to 15 minutes. Then take it off for 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat as needed.

Guidelines for managing bleeding

- Raise your arm above your head.
- Apply pressure to the site with your other hand for 5 minutes or longer.
- Cover the site with a bandage or put the pressure bandage back on the site, if needed.

Guidelines for managing swelling

- Raise your arm above your head.
- Apply pressure to the site for 3 to 5 minutes.
- Hold ice or a cold pack over the site for 10 to 15 minutes. Then take it off for 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat as needed to help reduce swelling.

Guidelines for managing bruising

- Hold ice or a cold pack over the site for 10 to 15 minutes. Then take it off for 10 to 15 minutes. Repeat as needed to help the bruising fade.
- Bruises may spread around your needle site and take about 7 to 10 days to go away.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider's office if you have:

- Discomfort, bleeding, or swelling that is not helped by following the guidelines above.
- Bleeding that you cannot stop.
- A fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher.
- Redness, warmth, or pain at your needle site.
- Any other unexpected side effects.
- Any questions or concerns.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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