



Quality, Innovation and Customer Driven

Patient Care Guide
for the
PMT[®] Halo System

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INTRODUCTION

You've already been through a lot to get to this point and we'd like to offer you some advice and guidance so as to make the rest of your recovery as smooth and comfortable as possible. You have suffered an injury to your cervical spine (the bones in your neck) and the way to proper healing of this injury is to immobilize and place traction on that part of your spine. Think of your vertebrae as being doughnuts stacked on top of one another with your spinal column running up through the center. With unstable vertebrae due to either a dislocation or fracture of the bones, the risk of damage to your spinal column is great. This is why you have been fitted with a PMT halo brace.

The brace consists of three major parts: the vest, the superstructure, and the ring. The ring goes around the head and is held in place by four or more pins that penetrate the outer layer of the skull. The vest is a plastic jacket that positions and holds the halo ring in place while distributing the weight of your head to your chest. The vest is lined with a comfortable soft wool or acrylic liner that lets your skin breathe. The superstructure is the network of four rods and two headblocks that connect your halo ring to your vest allowing proper positioning and traction to the neck.

The rest of this booklet will describe some helpful hints as well as some do's and don'ts for your recovery with the halo brace. Your family and friends should become familiar with this information to aid in this process.

The following information should be used only as a guideline. If you have further questions or need clarification, please check with your doctor.

CARING FOR YOUR HALO AT HOME

PIN CARE

To help avoid infection, the areas around your pins should be cleansed at least once a day. This is usually best done with the help of another person. The areas should be cleansed with soap and water or with hydrogen peroxide. Any crust or scabbing should be removed to allow drainage of the pin sites. If you notice that the pin sites are painful to the touch, inflamed, bleeding, oozing a runny discharge or feel loose, notify your physician immediately. These may be signs of infection. The skin around the pin should be pushed away from the pin to avoid adherence and cut down on the amount of scarring. Daily use of antibiotic or iodine containing ointments is not recommended except on the advice of a physician. Some pain and discomfort is normal for the first few days of wearing a halo. If at any time, the pain becomes extreme, or a pin feels loose or shifts, NEVER attempt to make any adjustments yourself, contact your physician immediately.

VEST CARE

It is extremely important that the vest fits you well. It should be snug but not restrictive to breathing or normal body movements. Over time, you may develop sensitive spots under or around the vest. These areas can be corrected by having your physician or orthotist trim the vest or offer extra padding in certain locations. If the vest becomes too tight, too loose, or you have trouble sitting or moving, have your physician or orthotist look at it and possibly fit you into a new vest. **DO NOT MAKE ANY MODIFICATIONS TO THE VEST ON YOUR OWN.**

The vest liner should be kept dry at all times. If it happens to get wet, dry it with a hair dryer on the cool setting. Do not remove the liner. If the liner gets dirty or develops an odor, call your orthotist to have a new liner put in. Soiled liners may be dry cleaned or hand washed with a mild soap and air dried.

If you notice any loose screws on the vest, contact your physician immediately. **DO NOT** attempt to make any adjustments yourself.

SKIN CARE

It is recommended that you wash under the vest on a daily basis, by passing a water-damped towel, in a drying motion, beneath the front and back of the vest. No soaps, lotions or oil-based powders should be used beneath the vest. Be careful not to allow the liner to absorb excessive amounts of moisture. Every two or three days, the skin should be cleaned in a similar fashion with an alcohol-moistened towel as tolerated by your skin type. Use a blow dryer on the cool setting after your bathing procedure to dry off any excess moisture.

BATHING

You should never attempt showering since there is no reliable way to keep your vest liner dry. You can either use sponge baths for the rest of your body or use a bath tub with about 2-3 inches of water, (make sure it isn't too close to your vest liner). Use plastic or towels to help keep your vest from getting wet.

HAIR WASHING

The best way to wash your hair is to lie on a flat surface (such as a bed or couch) with your head extended out over the edge. The vest should be covered with towels or plastic and a catch basin should be placed under your head. Also, if your head is slightly lower than your body, water will run off your head instead of down your vest. Your hair should be then washed as normal with care being taken not to bump or hit the pins, as this may cause discomfort. Once your hair has been washed, the pin sites should be cleaned as instructed in the pin care section. No hair coloring, permanents or treatments should be attempted while wearing a halo since this may lead to infected pin sites and discomfort around the pins.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR LIVING WITH A HALO BRACE

CLOTHING

The halo vest is usually worn next to the skin so your clothing will have to go over the vest. There should be no problem with pants or skirts, but shirts should be found that are a few sizes larger than what you would normally wear. Button up or large elastic collared shirts such as sweatshirts work the best. Some slight modifications may have to be made to the garment for a better fit, and it would be wise to practice a little before cutting your best clothes. In summer you may want to slide a modified cotton t-shirt under your vest since the wool liner may be a little warm. In winter, you will need an oversized coat or jacket and a couple of scarves to keep you warm. Always wear low heeled shoes with good traction to avoid falling or slipping.

SLEEPING

You may find yourself a little more tired than usual due to the stress you've been under and the traumatic injuries you have sustained. This is normal and should not be cause for alarm. You will find that you can sleep on your back, sides or stomach – whatever position you find most comfortable. Adding a pillow under your head may give you a more natural feel and aid in sleeping.

When rising from a lying down position, you will have to be cautious since bending at the waist, like a sit-up puts a lot of stress on your headpins. Instead, it will be easier to roll to one side and use your arms to press your torso up. If someone is assisting you, do not let them pull on the upright bars, as this will put stress on your headpins.

DIET AND EATING

Since your lifestyle has temporarily changed, you may find that your weight will fluctuate slightly. This is normal. If you notice your vest becoming too tight or too loose, you should have it adjusted by your doctor or orthotist. Swallowing will be difficult at first and care should be taken to ensure that your food is cut into small pieces and chew thoroughly to avoid choking.

TRAVELING

Extra weight has been added to the top half of your body and you will notice that your balance is different. The “top heavy” feeling will make it easier to fall over and may take some practice to get used to. It is a good idea to practice bending over and walking around with a spotter. Handrails will become very useful, as will learning to bend at the knees. Bumping into things may be a problem until you get used to the size of the halo and its bars, as well as the fact that it is harder to look down than it used to be.

It is not recommended for a halo wearer to drive a motorized vehicle since their field of vision is narrowed, and, in fact in some states, you may receive a ticket for driving with a halo on. Riding in a car doesn't pose any particular problems except when entering and exiting the vehicle. To enter, sit sideways on the seat and slide back with your body bent forward, then swing your legs around. To exit, just reverse the same procedure. Seat belts should always be worn, since any sudden jerks or stops could cause a problem with your pins. Other forms of public transportation should pose no major problems other than getting into tight crowds.

READING

Using an inclined desk or music stand to hold your reading or writing materials will help alleviate tired arms.

HALO REMOVAL

Congratulations! Your physician has advised you that your halo is ready for removal. Once the halo has been removed by your physician or orthotist, your neck may feel very weak since it has not supported your head in some time. Because of this, you will be fitted for a neck collar to allow the neck some time to strengthen. This normally takes a couple of weeks.

The actual removal of the halo is a simple procedure that should take a total of about 10 minutes in the doctors office. It takes about a minute to remove all four pins and only slight discomfort is experienced at this time. The adhesion of the skin to the pin is massaged away before removal and the pin sites are massaged after removal to lessen the degree of scarring. Besides massaging the pin sites, no unusual care must be taken except what would be done for a small cut.

Since your neck is weak, be careful when returning to normal activities and refer to your doctor as far as resuming contact sports and other physical activities..

SCARRING

If your scars are bothersome, PMT manufactures silicone Gel Sheeting. New Beginnings Gel Sheeting has been clinically proven to reduce the appearance of scars.

If you would like more information contact PMT directly at 1-800-MANKIND (626-5463)

EMERGENCY INSTRUCTIONS

If your pins jar loose, please go to an emergency room for assistance. In case of cardiac distress, CPR instructions are printed below. Be sure your family and friends are knowledgeable of these instructions.

1. The patient should be lying on a flat surface on their back (i.e. floor, table, ground).
2. Loosen and release the side waist buckles.
3. The front portion of the vest is manufactured with a crease in the shell. Fold the vest back at this point, exposing the sternum.
4. Using the back portion of the vest as a “crash board” perform CPR as necessary. CPR should only be administered by those that are certified to do so.

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

Orthopedic Surgeon _____
Phone _____

Neurosurgeon _____
Phone _____

Orthotist _____
Phone _____

Police _____
Phone _____

Fire _____
Phone _____

EMERGENCY CALL 911

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