



## **SURGICAL SERVICES**

# **PATIENT CARE GUIDE FOR THE HALO TRACTION**



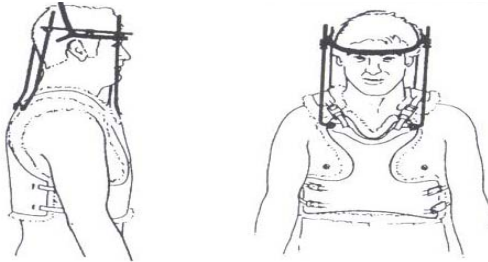
## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Clothing	4
Skin Care	4
Bathing	5
Hair Washing	6
Sleeping	6
Diet and Eating	8
Sexual Activity	9
Activity	10
Travelling	11
Pin Care	13
Vest Care	13
Wrench	13
General Information	14
Follow-Up	14
Instructions When to Call	15

## Introduction

You have had surgery or suffered an injury to your neck and the way to properly heal this injury is to immobilize and place traction on your head and neck. The halo does for your neck what a cast does for a broken arm. The risk to your spinal column is great and this is why you have been fitted with a special brace. Each person's condition is different.

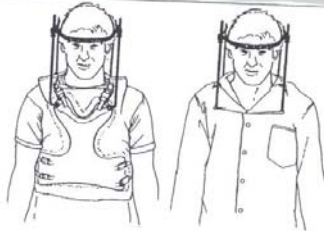
The brace consist of three major parts: the vest (worn on your chest), ring or halo (encircles your head) and rods (extends from the ring to the vest). It is applied by your physician. You will be going home with the halo traction in place and it ***must be worn at all times.***



This booklet has been designed to explain the proper care as well as assist you in the healing process while wearing the halo traction. It should only be used as a guide and if you have any further questions, please contact your physician.

## **Clothing**

The halo vest is usually worn next to the skin. The vest is lined with either wool or some acrylic matter. You may want to slide a cotton t-shirt under your vest. The shirt is pulled from the bottom under the vest and secured at the shoulders. The shoulders seams should be split and secured with Velcro. Shirts or blouses should be a few sizes larger than what you normally wear and button up the front. There should be no problems with pants, shorts, or skirts. Always wear low-heeled or runners with good traction to avoid falling or slipping.



## **Skin Care**

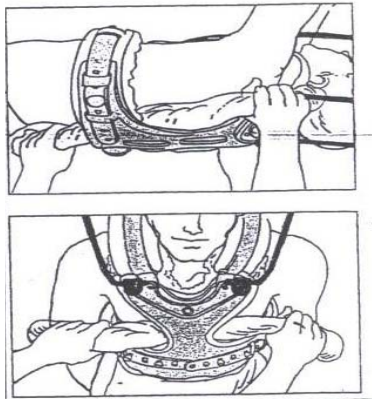
Your skin under the vest should be looked at daily; a flashlight can be used for this. Have someone check the skin for red or blistered areas especially on bony prominences (scapula, shoulders or hips), excessive perspiration, especially pressure sores.

You should also wash under the vest on a daily basis by passing a water-dampened towel, beneath the front and back portions of the vest. Pull the towel back and forth under the vest. Be careful not to allow the liner to absorb excessive amounts of moisture.

**DO NOT USE** soaps, creams, lotions or oil-based powders beneath the vest. These items may irritate your skin.

### **Bathing**

You should never attempt to shower since there is no reliable way to keep your vest liner dry. You can either use sponge baths or a bathtub with about 2-3 inches of water (make sure it is not close to your vest liner). Use towels or plastic to help keep your vest from getting wet.



## **Hair Washing**

A family member or friend should help you wash your hair. Hair washing may be done in whatever manner is most comfortable for the individual. Use mild soap such as baby shampoo.

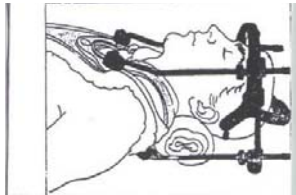
One way to wash your hair is to lie on a flat surface (such as a bed, two chairs or couch) with your head extended out over the edge. A second way is to lean over the bath tub. The vest should be covered with towels. A basin or pail should be placed under your head. Also if your head is slightly lower than your body, water will run off your head instead of down under your vest. Your hair can be washed normally with care being taken not to bump or hit the pins.

No hair coloring, use of hair spray and gel products or other hair treatments should be attempted while wearing the halo since this may lead to infection at the pin sites and discomfort around the pins.

## **Sleeping**

You may find yourself a little more tired than normal due to the stress you have been under and the traumatic injury you have sustained.

You may find you do not sleep well at night and you may require naps during the days as well. You may wake up every time you turn over, at least initially, and it may not be easy to find a comfortable position. You may sleep on your back, sides or stomach - whatever position you find the most comfortable. The placement of a rolled-up towel, or pillow either under your neck if sleeping on your back or under your cheek if side sleeping. This may give you a more natural feel and aid in sleeping. However, it is important that the pillow or towel do not apply pressure. Sleeping with the bed or mattress slightly elevated may help become more comfortable.



When rising from a lying-down position, you will have to be cautious since bending at the waist, sitting straight up, puts a lot of stress on your headpins.

Instead, it will be easier to roll to one side, drop your legs over the side of the bed and use your arms to press your upper body slowly. If someone is assisting you, do not let them pull on the rods.



## **Diet and Eating**

Wearing a Halo apparatus can be quite tiring, and you can burn a lot of calories just carrying it around. A regular diet with normal size portions with lots of protein and milk or milk products is all that is required to help with the healing process.

Swallowing will be difficult at first and care should be taken to ensure that your food is cut into small pieces and chewed thoroughly to avoid choking.

You may notice weight fluctuations and this is normal. However, it is not advisable to gain a lot of weight because your vest will not fit properly. Should you gain or lose a great deal of weight, you will have to have the vest adjusted.

## **Sexual Activity**

Sexual activity can be carried out but will have to be modified. The Halo apparatus, especially the rods, were not made for close contact, even hugging, so allowances will have to be made. You will want to try different positions in order to have sex with some degree of comfort, although some positions are safer for your partner than others. A side-lying position is probably the most comfortable or you may lie on your back and assume a passive role.

If your injury has been particularly difficult to realign or hold in position, your physician may recommend that you abstain from sexual activity for six or eight weeks.

Experiment within reason but your partner and you must be careful, gentle and tolerant.

When kissing you must be careful not to bump the other person's head with your Halo. Remember it is easy to misjudge distances between an object and your apparatus.

## **Activity**

You will notice that your balance is different. This “top heavy” feeling will make it easier to fall over or bump into furniture, doorways and cupboards. It will take some practice. This feeling will decrease as you become accustomed to the apparatus. It is a good idea to practice bending at the knees and walking around with a spotter.

It is important for your mental well-being that you do not “go into hiding”. Of course, when you go out you should be prepared for comments because the apparatus is rather strange looking and may well gain attention. Be active, but use good judgment.

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 rods. It will be harder to look down see things in front of you.

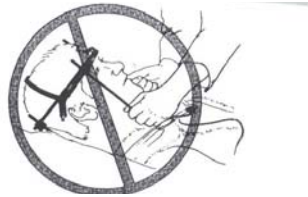
You have unlimited walking privileges and going up and down stairs. Do not run, jump, weight lift, do sit-ups, push-ups or attempt to lift anything heavier than 5 pounds.

Avoid crowds or situations where you might be jostled or shoved.

Do not ride a bike or skateboard. Stop any activity that makes your neck hurt. Because you will not be able to see your feet when walking, look ahead. Be alert for toys, rugs, uneven floor or ground surface and pets.

Bend over slightly when entering doorways. The rods protruding out front can be bumped very easily and cause you some discomfort. Be careful and allow room when opening doors.

***NEVER PULL ON ANY PART OF THE HALO TRACTION.***



## **Travelling**

Travelling in cars does not pose a problem especially if the car is large. Large cars are easier to get in and out of and have a smoother ride than small cars.

However, your physician may limit your traveling to physician's appointments. It is more convenient if you have a companion.

**ABSOLUTELY NO OPERATING A MOTOR VEHICLE UNTIL YOUR PHYSICIAN ALLOWS THIS ACTIVITY.**

Your field of vision and movement is narrowed. You are considered an impaired driver and could cause an accident.

**Entering a Car**

To enter, sit sideways on the seat and slide back with your body bent forward, then swing your legs around. If possible, recline the seat as far back as possible. 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 traction.

You can ride in a airplane with no problem. The airlines will let you pre-board which you will find very convenient. Just a note of caution that you may set the metal detector alarms at the airport.

Trains, subways and buses can be a bit more difficult because they can shake quite a bit and you are not assured of a seat when you get on. These modes of transportation also tend to be crowded.

You should ask your physician for specific instructions regarding travel.

### **Pin Care**

To help avoid infection, the areas around your pins should be cleansed at least twice a day with Q-tips are the easiest to clean with. It is important to use a new Q-tip for each pin site, as this decreases contamination from one pin site to another. **DO NOT USE** any ointments or antiseptics on the pin sites unless they are prescribed by your physician.

### **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. Do not remove the liner. **Do not make any modifications to the vest on your own.** Keep the vest dry at all times. If you should get the liner wet, you can dry it by using a regular hair dryer on a “cool or low” setting. Frequent wetting of the lining of the vest will cause it to mat. It may even damage your skin and can cause infections.

### **Wrench**

The metal wrench should be secured to the front of the vest at all times. **The wrench is to be used only by medical personnel.**

## **General Information**

When helping a person in halo traction, avoid hitting the metal framework as this transmits sounds through the pins. Because the pins are titanium, they can become very hot or cold quickly. You should not sit in the sun for any length of time or be out in the cold unless protected.

## **Follow-Up**

You will receive an appointment date or given instructions to see your physician as directed on the patient discharge instruction sheet. During your follow-up appointment a new x-ray will be done and any adjustments to the halo will be done. Your physician will inform you when you can go back to work. You may not be able to work while wearing the halo traction. You will be given a wrench to take home with you. This is to be taken to your physician's appointment.

## **Instructions When to Call:**

**Please contact your physician or come to the Emergency Department if you experience any of the following:**

- Pain, redness, swelling at the pin sites
- Headaches
- Any green or yellow drainage at the pin sites
- Any bleeding from the pin sites
- Any strange smelling discharge coming from the pin site
- Pins that move or shift
- Any open skin around the pin sites
- Any flu-like symptoms
- Any fever, shaking or chills
- Loose halo or halo part(s) or clicking noises coming from the device
- Ability to nod or excessively move your head
- Bruising or swelling on the neck or back
- Tingling or numbness in the arms or legs
- Trouble controlling your bowels or bladder
- Loss of feeling and movement in arms or legs

# NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Tel: 807-684-6000  
980 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay  
Ontario, Canada, P7B 6V4  
[www.tbrhsc.net](http://www.tbrhsc.net)