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Post Operative Information for Tissue Expander Placement

Tissue expansion is a relatively straightforward procedure that enables the body to "grow" extra skin for use in reconstructing almost any part of the body.

A silicone balloon expander is inserted under the skin near the area to be repaired and then gradually filled with salt water over time, causing the skin to stretch and grow.

What to Expect During the Initial Expander Placement and Weekly Expansion Process

In most cases, the initial operation will take one to two hours, depending on the size and area of skin to be expanded. Dr. Bartlett will begin by making a small incision next to the area of skin to be repaired, and will do everything possible to make the incision as inconspicuous as possible.

He will then insert the silicone balloon expander in a pocket created beneath the skin. The expander includes a tiny tube and a self-sealing valve within an access port that allows the surgeon to gradually fill the expander with saline solution. The port is usually left just beneath the surface of the skin.

How your child feels after surgery depends on the extent and complexity of the procedure. The initial surgery to insert the expander causes most patients only temporary discomfort which can be controlled with medication prescribed by Dr. Bartlett.

One week after the expander is placed, you'll be asked to return to our office to check the surgical site. At that time, you will be instructed on how to apply the numbing cream to the port, you will also be given a prescription for the numbing cream. After that one week appointment, you will return to the office once a week so that the expander can be injected with additional saline. As the expander enlarges, the skin will stretch. In some people, this procedure can cause minor discomfort which is usually controlled by Tylenol.

Restrictions during Expansion Process

How soon your child resumes their normal routine depends on the length, complexity and type of surgery they have had. Most tissue expansion parents find that their child can keep up with their normal routine while the expander is in place. If the expander is located in an area that is prone to excess pressure (such as the back, or the back of the head), then it is suggested that as the expander increases in size padding should be applied to the area around the expander so that the expanded skin does not develop a pressure sore. Padding can include a rolled up towel or blanket to keep the pressure off of the area.

Secondary Operation

When the skin has stretched enough to cover the affected area, you'll have a second operation to remove the expander and reposition the new tissue