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Warning Signs of Post-Plastic Surgery Tissue Damage and Infection

Recognizing Complications Early to Support Healing and Recovery

Introduction

Plastic surgery—whether cosmetic or reconstructive—can offer transformative results, but recovery requires careful monitoring to ensure optimal healing. While most procedures proceed without complications, patients and caregivers should remain vigilant for warning signs of tissue damage and infection. Early detection and prompt intervention can prevent minor issues from developing into serious medical concerns.

Why Vigilance Matters

After surgery, the body's healing process involves inflammation, tissue remodeling, and scar formation. However, tissue damage or infection can occur when healing is disrupted due to poor circulation, fluid buildup, bacteria, or excessive tension at incision sites. These complications may compromise surgical outcomes, prolong recovery, and, in rare cases, lead to systemic illness.

Common Warning Signs of Tissue Damage

1. **Delayed Wound Healing.** Incisions that remain open, weep fluid or show no signs of closure beyond the expected timeframe may indicate poor tissue perfusion or underlying necrosis.
2. **Dark or Dusky Skin Around the Surgical Site.** Skin that turns purple, black, or gray may suggest tissue necrosis (death of skin or fat). This is especially important to monitor in flap surgeries or procedures involving significant tissue manipulation.
3. **Hardness, Lumps, or Abnormal Texture.** Areas that become firm or nodular under the skin may signal fat necrosis or seroma formation, which can interfere with the contour and symmetry of the surgical site.
4. **Unexpected Pain or Numbness.** Some discomfort is normal, but worsening pain after initial improvement—or total loss of sensation—can indicate nerve injury, infection, or evolving tissue death.
5. **Wound Dehiscence.** If a surgical incision reopens or pulls apart, it may be due to excessive tension, infection, or poor tissue integrity. This condition requires immediate medical attention.

Signs of Post-Surgical Infection

1. **Increased Redness, Swelling, or Warmth.** Mild inflammation is part of healing, but rapid spreading redness, persistent swelling, or localized heat often signals infection.
2. **Fever or Chills.** A fever over 100.4°F (38°C), especially when accompanied by chills, is a systemic sign that the body is fighting infection.
3. **Foul-Smelling or Discolored Discharge.** Yellow, green, or cloudy drainage from the incision—especially if foul-smelling—can indicate bacterial contamination.
4. **Rapid Heart Rate or Fatigue.** Signs of systemic infection, such as a racing heart or sudden exhaustion, should never be ignored, as they can precede more serious complications like sepsis.
5. **Abscess Formation.** A painful, swollen area filled with pus may appear under the skin near the surgical site. This usually requires drainage and antibiotics.

When to Seek Medical Attention

Any of the above symptoms, particularly if they worsen rapidly, warrant a prompt call to your surgeon or healthcare provider. Early intervention may include wound care, antibiotics, surgical revision, or lymphatic drainage to promote tissue healing and reduce inflammation.

Supporting Safe Recovery

Post-operative care is as vital as the surgery itself. Follow all recovery instructions, attend follow-up visits, avoid smoking, and monitor your body daily. For patients receiving liposuction, abdominoplasty, or other procedures with significant swelling, adjunctive therapies like **Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD)** can support circulation and reduce fluid accumulation, potentially preventing complications.



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