

The Doctor is In [Bed]: Dr. Rachel Prepares for Surgery

By Rachel Abrams, M.D.

This blog is a bit different from all the others as I am writing as a patient-to-be. My wise ENT doctor, Alexis Lane, has agreed that my enlarged and cryptic (in the “multiple caves” sense, not in the “short” sense) tonsils are to be relegated to the bin of lost body parts on December 30. Now, you might think I would feel relieved to be rid of these recurrent sore-throat, chronic tonsillitis nightmares that I have experienced since the age of 6, and I am. But as a holistic doctor by nature – I don’t LIKE intervention – especially when it comes to my own body. Yet I have always let reason rule and, tomorrow morning, I am going under the knife. Tonsillectomy is fairly routine in children, but in adults it is more tricky and MUCH more painful.

Preparing for Surgery

I have decided to make the best of the upcoming surgery by asking for help from all of my friends in the healing community – figuring that together we could develop an ideal protocol for less pain and rapid healing. The fabulous Dr. Lane started me out with a list of things NOT to eat or take for 1-2 weeks before this surgery. Most of these can cause bleeding, which is the primary complication of a tonsillectomy and is a concern for all surgeries. First on the list are the pain relievers: aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil) and naprosyn (Aleve). A variety of herbs and supplements can also exacerbate bleeding so are also on the “no-no” list: fish oil; the G’s: ginseng, green tea, ginkgo biloba, garlic (ok to eat but not to take in concentrated form); St. John’s Wort, Vitamin E, and Chinese herbs and seaweed. I had to stop my multiple vitamin (which has herbal extracts) and otherwise did pretty well avoiding these, with the exception of a pot of oolong tea from my tea fairy, Annaliese Keller at the farmer’s market. It was delicious—and not EXACTLY green tea – really something between green and black, so I thought it okay not to mention this to Dr. Lane. I also took this as an excuse to enjoy more coffee– perhaps not so healing, but fun! And no alcohol for two days prior, so I’ve had to forget about the lovely Belgian holiday beer sitting invitingly in my fridge...I’m not really willing to confess that one to the good Dr. Lane, should I be unfortunate enough to bleed and screw up her incredibly low complication rate.

Dr. Lane also recommended eating fresh pineapple, ½ cup daily, for 5 days prior to surgery – seems that the bromelain in the pineapple is good at decreasing bruising after surgery. Bromelain is anti-inflammatory and decreases swelling, but can also thin the blood, which is why the good doctor has me eating pineapple and not taking bromelain, so, again, I don’t bleed out. She also has me taking a form of arnica (a homeopathic remedy) that is specifically developed for surgery or acute injuries, called Sin Ecch. Arnica is a classic homeopathic medication for helping heal wounds and bruising.

The brilliant Aimée Shunney, naturopathic physician, thinks the pineapple and arnica are both great ideas. The bad news is that as I start my pre-operative arnica dosing, I am now completely off coffee as it counteracts the effect of any homeopathic medication. All good things must come to an end, and I had to resist Starbucks today while ducking into

Safeway for Cepacol extra-strength throat lozenges. Dr. Shunney also put me on Turmeric capsules, which are anti-inflammatory and don't cause bleeding, three times daily for 5 days prior and afterwards if I can possibly get them downwe'll see about that. She also recommends a relatively high dose of vitamin A to speed healing (150,000 IU daily for 5 days prior and 1 week after surgery). She says that fish oil in lower doses can also help with surgery, but not when the major risk of the surgery is bleeding (like mine). She also added the homeopathic remedy Phosphorous 30C to assist in stopping bleeding (5 tiny sugary balls three times daily—thank God I don't need to swallow pills).

My talented colleague, Larry Bernstein, gave me a fabulous pre-op massage and craniosacral session and will be treating me after surgery as well to help with potential neck and spine pain. I also had a wonderful consultation with Ayurvedic (the traditional Indian system of medicine) practitioner Talya Lutzker, who has me wearing a lovely blue scarf for the healing of my 5th chakra and using a throat oil externally with fennel and clary sage. And my buddies Lee Holden and Adrianna Gonzalez are coming by in the days after surgery to treat me with acupuncture. Add to that my dear friend, Bobbi Spurr, who is bringing a nutritional IV (LOTS of throat surgery patients get dehydrated), and I feel pretty pampered and EXTREMELY loved.

The Power of Healing Positive Meditation and Prayers

Which just leaves me and my own state of mind. Plenty of research shows that meditation on positive thoughts can reduce complications and speed healing. My friends, John and Deo Robbins, suggested that I use a positive phrase about what I want from the surgery and how I would like to heal and go on in my life. I considered making a recording myself, but decided that hearing the healing voices of those who love me most and releasing myself into their care would be healing on many levels. As of tonight, my son Jesse and his friend Joel have written and recorded a song on guitar and each of my children, Jesse, Kayla and Eliana, and my beloved husband, Doug, have recorded their blessings over it. I will be listening to their sweet voices as I drift off into anesthetic trance and wake up again. I feel incredibly blessed.

I also have plenty of prayers from family and friends—there is quite a bit of research that prayer helps as well—even distant prayer. The prayers are all different—my Jewish mother-in law, Patricia, will be doing distance healing in the Therapeutic Touch tradition along with my father-in-law, Richard. I imagine my mother saying her prayers in her garden. My father, himself a Methodist minister, assures me that he will be praying for me constantly during the surgery – while quail hunting with another Methodist minister. Bang, bang. I'll take all the prayers I can get. May my tonsils fall like elegant, feathered quail from the sky and land in the hunter's loving hands – or at least the soft mouth of his trusty dog.