

Healing from skull surgery (typically a craniotomy) is a two-part process: the **soft tissue** (skin and muscle) heals relatively quickly, while the **bone** itself takes much longer to fuse back together.

The Healing Timeline

Phase	Timeline	What is Happening
Initial Wound Healing	1 – 2 Weeks	Incision closes; staples or stitches are usually removed during this window.
Early Recovery this was the length of my stay at pen health the 4th or 5th time.	2 – 6 Weeks	Brain swelling subsides, and energy levels begin to return. Most patients can return to light activity.
Intermediate Healing	3 – 6 Months	The "bone flap" begins to produce new bone tissue to bridge the gap. Most "daily life" restrictions are lifted.
Full Bone Fusion	6 – 12 Months	The bone is typically fully fused and stable, similar to how a broken leg or arm heals.

Key Milestones and Expectations

- **The First 48 Hours:** You will likely be in the ICU or a high-dependency unit for monitoring.¹ This is the period of highest risk for brain swelling or bleeding.
- **The "Six-Week Wall":** Many patients feel a surge of fatigue around the 4–6 week mark. This is normal as the brain uses a massive amount of energy to repair itself.
- **Physical Sensations:** It is very common to feel "clicking," "popping," or "whooshing" sounds in the head for several weeks.² You may also experience numbness around the incision or jaw stiffness, which can take months to resolve.

Safety and Activity Restrictions

To ensure the bone heals correctly and the brain remains protected, surgeons generally advise:

- **No Heavy Lifting:** Avoid lifting anything heavier than 5 lbs (a gallon of milk) for at least **6 weeks**.³
- **No Strenuous Exercise:** Most "high-impact" activities (running, weightlifting) are restricted for **2–3 months**.
- **No Contact Sports:**⁴ Sports with a risk of head impact (football, boxing, etc.) are often prohibited for **6 months to a full year** until imaging confirms the bone is solid.

Factors That Affect Your Speed of Healing

- **Age:** Younger patients typically regenerate bone faster than older adults.⁵
- **Nutrition:** A diet high in protein, Vitamin D, and Calcium supports bone regrowth.
- **Smoking:** Nicotine significantly slows down bone fusion and increases the risk of infection at the incision site.
- **Underlying Conditions:** Conditions like diabetes or previous radiation therapy in the area can extend the recovery timeline.⁶

[!IMPORTANT]

When to call the doctor immediately: If you notice clear fluid leaking from the wound, a "mushy" swelling under the skin, a fever, or a sudden, severe "thunderclap" headache.