

Post-Operative Care: Spine Surgery

Use these guidelines to speed your recovery from spinal surgery.

Symptoms to Watch for

- Bleeding, drainage, redness or swelling from your incision area.
- Feelings of flu-like symptoms (e.g., nausea, general body aches, or temperature over 100 degrees for longer than 24 hours).
- Severe headache associated with vomiting or light sensitivity.
- Any change in sensation of your arms, hands, legs or feet (e.g., increase in numbness, tingling, or pain).
- Any loss of bladder or bowel control.
- Frequent need to urinate small amounts of urine or feeling of bladder distention.
- If you experience pain, swelling, and/or redness behind your knees or calves, go to your nearest emergency department as these can be symptoms of a blood clot in your legs.

- **Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room if you experience: Shortness of breath, inability to swallow, or chest pain.**

Medications

- Prescribed medication(s) should be taken only as directed. Take all medication with food in your stomach unless otherwise directed. If you experience any abnormal reaction to the medication, discontinue the medication and contact our office.
- As your pain lessens, you should decrease the amount of pain medication you are taking. We suggest you substitute the narcotics with over-the-counter Tylenol as your pain decreases.
- Do not stop taking your narcotics abruptly since this may cause withdrawal side effects.
- Narcotic pain medications will not be refilled after normal working hours (8:30-4:30, Monday-Thursday) or on weekends. Please allow 24 hours for refill of any medications.
- Do not drive while taking narcotic medications.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages while taking prescription pain medications.
- You should resume the medications you were taking prior to surgery once you get home, unless otherwise instructed. If you have any questions regarding these medications, please contact your physician.

- It is common to prescribe stool softeners to take after your hospital stay. It is important that you take these as directed.

Diet

- You may resume your normal, pre-operative diet as tolerated.
- Pain medications and decreased activity can cause constipation. To prevent this, eat foods high in fiber and drink 6-8 glasses of water per day. If needed, take an over-the-counter stool softener if one was not prescribed for you. Your bowels should be working normally within 3-5 days of surgery.
- Foods high in protein and vitamin C can also aid the wound healing process.
- If you had a fusion, your diet should contain 1,000-1,500 mg of calcium daily to optimize conditions for adequate fusion. If you are not getting enough calcium in your diet, you should take 1,500 mg of oral calcium every day. Please check with your physician if you have a history of kidney stones.

Incision Care and Dressing

- Please change your dressings with sterile gauze daily until your wound is completely dry.
- Although you may start showering when your wound is completely dry (about 3-5 days), do not submerge in a bathtub until the wound is healed over (approximately 3 weeks).
- If you have Steri-Strips on your incision, allow them to fall off on their own.
- If you have Dermabond ("sterile super glue") on your incision, it will likely begin to peel off by itself after 1-2 weeks.
- You may apply an ice pack to the surgery site for 20 minutes three times a day for comfort and to reduce swelling.
- You may have dissolvable sutures or staples that will be addressed at your follow up visit.

Activity

- Plan to rest for the first 24-48 hours following discharge from the hospital.
- Avoid excessive bending, twisting, pushing, pulling, or lifting more than 5 pounds.
- Walk twice a day for 30 minutes using a walker or cane as needed.
- Avoid sitting or standing for more than 30 minutes at a time for the first two weeks.
- If you were fitted with a brace, please wear it for most of the day when you are active as instructed by your physician. You may remove it at night, for showers.

Reminders for Patients Who Had a Fusion

- Do NOT take anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil), or naproxen (Aleve) as they are known to inhibit bone healing.
- Do NOT smoke or use other tobacco products for at least 3 months (ideally quit altogether) since nicotine inhibits wound and bone healing. Use of products containing nicotine significantly increases your risk for wound and fusion complications.
- If you had a fusion, do not take anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen or naproxen (as they are known to inhibit bone healing).

Follow-up appointment

Please contact our office the first business day after discharge from the hospital to make your first post-operative visit 2 weeks after surgery.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns: **614-293-0706**.