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Cervical Fusion Surgery: Post-Operative Instructions

Incision Care

- Usually your stitches are beneath the surface of your skin. They will be absorbed into your body as you heal. They may be reinforced with steri-strips (sterile strips of tape) applied directly to the skin surface.
- Without steri-strips, the dressing is a clear adhesive. It should start to peel off in a week or two.
- You may shower, but no tub baths.
- You must keep your incision(s) dry for 2 days following your surgery.
- You should remove the steri-strips in 5 days unless instructed that they will be removed at your follow up appointment.

Pain

You may still have some pain, numbness or tingling in your neck or arm(s). This should decrease gradually as the nerves heal. An ice pack may be used on the incision to reduce swelling and pain.

Collar Instructions

- You must wear your collar at all times when out of bed.
- You may take it off to shower and shave.
- Hold your head straight while the collar is off.
- Do not tilt head back to shampoo or shave.
- Your physician will determine when you are ready to wean out of your collar, but you are usually wearing the collar for 4 weeks.

Call Our Office

If you...

- Feel severe pain, weakness or numbness in your leg(s)/arm(s).
- Notice excessive drainage, swelling or increased redness around your incision.
- Have a fever of 101 degrees or greater.
- Have a new problem controlling your bladder or bowel.
- Have difficulty breathing.

Medication

- If you were given a Medrol Dosepak (steroid/anti-inflammatory medication) you may notice a slight increase in the above symptoms, as the Medrol Dosepak decreases. This is due to swelling and irritation around the nerve and will improve as you heal. Complete the full course of Medrol according to instructions in the package.
- You may be instructed to start taking a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication (such as Ibuprofen, Naprosyn, Lodine) after you finish the Medrol Dosepak.
- You will be given a prescription for pain medicine when you are discharged from the hospital. Take as directed on the prescription. **Do not drink alcoholic beverages while taking this medication.**
- You may be given a prescription for muscle relaxants (to reduce spasms or tightness in your back). This medication may make you drowsy. **Do not drink alcoholic beverages while taking this medication.**
- Medications will be refilled during normal business hours (8:30 am – 5:00 pm, M-Thrs, 9:30 am – Noon Fri), as the physician on call cannot renew prescriptions.

The next morning, you may return home if you live out of town. You do not need to phone and check in but if you have questions, please do so.

IMPORTANT

The most dangerous but extremely rare risk of the same day disk surgery is the development of internal bleeding. This can put pressure on the spinal cord or nerves and cause paralysis. The potential crippling complication can be treated by reopening the incision and removing the blood, usually a clot. That is why the above precautions must be taken.

Activity

First Week:

- Limit auto travel. Passenger only. No driving.
- Walk in your house for first couple of days after surgery. Then you may begin to walk outside for short periods 1 to 2 blocks per day. Do not overdo it!
- Do not reach for objects above your head.
- Avoid house and yard work. You may cook, but do not lift more than 5 pounds until released to do so.
- Do not drink from a bottle or can. Use a glass or a straw.
- Sleep on a firm mattress supporting your head on a pillow so it is in a level position.
- You may shower, but no tub baths if you have a hip incision. Pat dry, do not rub.
- Do not sleep with your arms over your head. You may lie on your back or side, but not on your abdomen.
- You may shampoo your hair in the shower only. Do not lean over the sink to shampoo. Hold your head in a neutral position.
- Do not cradle the phone between your cheek and shoulder.
- Take a nap or at least rest in the morning and again in the afternoon.

Second Week:

- Increase walking distance as tolerated, working up to 1 mile per day.
- Take a nap or at least rest in the morning and again in the afternoon.
- Continue to avoid house and yard work.
- You may begin driving short distances, no more than 30 minutes. Make certain your seat, mirrors, and restraints are properly adjusted.

Third Week:

- You may resume sexual activity, do not support your body weight with your arms for the first few weeks.
- Increase walking distance as tolerated, working up to 1 mile per day.
- You may be up and about as tolerated.
- Begin light housework. Do not sweep or vacuum. Stop for frequent breaks. Use good body mechanics.

Fourth Week:

- Gradually increase all activity as tolerated.

Follow-Up Appointment

Your first post-op appointment should be 2-3 weeks following your discharge from the hospital. Please call early to get a convenient time. You will be scheduled for an x-ray prior to your appointment.

Return to Work

Return to work varies with the type of occupation and will be discussed at your follow-up appointment.