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Lumbar/Cervical Disc 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 will 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.
- Keep incision dry for one week following surgery.
- You may shower, but no tub baths.
- You should change the outer dressing daily to keep the incision clean and dry. You may remove the outer dressing in one week.
- If external sutures closed the incision, keep dry until sutures are removed. Change dressing daily for one week, then leave open to air.

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.

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.

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 on 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-Thurs, 9:30 am – Noon Fri), as the physician on call cannot renew prescriptions.

Day Surgery Instructions

Day surgery can be offered to many patients undergoing disk surgery. When you get back to your room after surgery, you may be too sore or nauseated to go home and an overnight stay in the hospital can be easily arranged.

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:

- You may ride as a passenger in a car but do not drive.
- Walk around the house. You should be up and about for half of the day. You may begin walking outside after several days, slowly increasing the distance as tolerated. Do not overdo it!
- Limit stair climbing to a couple of times per day, using the hand rail.
- Limit sitting to ½ hour at a time. Use straight back chair. (Lumbar surgery only.)
- Avoid house and yard work. You may cook but do not lift anything heavy.
- No sexual activity.
- You may shower but no tub baths. Pat incision dry, do not rub.
- Take a nap or at least rest in the morning and again in the afternoon.
- Sleep on a firm mattress.
- You may lie on your back or side, but not on your abdomen. A small pillow, towel or lumbar roll might be helpful to keep your back straight.

Second Week:

- Increase walking distance as tolerated, working up to 1 mile per day.
- You may climb stairs as tolerated. Be very careful coming down.
- Continue to avoid house and yard work.
- Continue to refrain from sexual activity.
- Continue to shower, and stay out of the tub.
- You can drive short trips of 10 to 20 minutes duration, if it has not hurt you to ride as a passenger. Move the seat close enough to the steering wheel so you can easily reach the pedals. A small pillow or towel behind your back may be helpful.

Third Week:

- Increase walking distance as tolerated, working up to 1 mile per day.
- You may be up and about as tolerated.
- You may resume sexual activity, if you are relatively pain-free.
- Begin light housework. Do not sweep or vacuum. Stop for frequent breaks. Use good body mechanics.
- You may bathe in tub, if desired.

Fourth Week:

- Gradually increase all activity as tolerated.
- Increase your walking distance to one mile a day, as tolerated.
- You may use hot tub or spa.

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.

Return to Work

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