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Lumbar Fusion: 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. Medical glue will be used to close the outside layer of skin.
- You may shower, but no tub baths. Pat incision dry.
- If you have skin staples closing your incision, the gauze bandage should be changed daily.
- You may shower, but no tub baths. Cover incision with waterproof barrier bandage when showering while staples are in place.

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, which does not resolve with Tylenol.
- Have a new problem controlling your bladder or bowel.
- Have difficulty breathing or swallowing.

Pain

You may still have some pain, numbness or tingling in your back or leg(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 in the package. Common side effects of steroids may include, but are not limited to, GI upset, insomnia and anxiety.
- You will be given a prescription for pain medicine when you are discharged from the hospital. Take as directed on the prescription. ***Do not drive, operate machinery, or 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 drive, operate machinery or drink alcoholic beverages while on 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.

Activity

First Week:

- Limit auto travel. Passenger only, no driving.
- Avoid bending or twisting. Limit lifting to 5 pounds.
- Walk around the house as tolerated, do not overdo it.
- Limit stair climbing to a couple of times per day, using the hand rail.
- Avoid house and yard work. You may cook but do not lift anything more than 5 pounds.
- No sexual activity.
- Take a nap or at least rest in the morning and again in the afternoon.

Activity (cont.)

First Week:

- Try to 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:

- Start short walks outside, 1 to 2 blocks, twice a day. You may increase this as tolerated. Do not overdo it!
- You may climb stairs as tolerated. Be very careful coming down.
- Continue 5 pound lifting restriction.
- Continue to refrain from sexual activity.
- Continue to shower, and stay out of the tub.
- No driving, passenger only until first post-operative office visit.

Third Week:

- Increase walking distance as tolerated.
- You may be up and about as tolerated.
- You may resume sexual activity.
- Begin light housework. Do not sweep or vacuum. Stop for frequent breaks. Use good body mechanics.
- You may bathe in tub, if desired.
- You may now drive.

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 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.