



Jon Krumerman, M.D.

Cervical Fusion Surgery: Post-Operative Instructions

Incision Care

- Usually, your stitches are beneath the surface of the skin. They will be absorbed into your body as you heal. They are covered by Dermabond, a skin glue that protects your incision. The glue will start to flake off around 2 weeks after surgery, just let it run its course.
- You may shower with a waterproof dressing for the first 7 days. Keep the incision dry and change the dressing once daily. After 7 days you can leave the incision open to air and shower without it covered. You'll be approved to start soaking/swimming 3-4 weeks after surgery if the incision has healed well.
- Dressings will often be supplied by the hospital. If you would like to purchase them before surgery, or run out of what was provided, you can look for a Tegaderm+pad at a medical supply pharmacy or just select any waterproof dressing from your pharmacy.
- If you had a drain, the drain site may leak fluid for a day or two, then it should scab over.

Collar Instructions

- You must wear your collar when you are up and moving around. You may take it off to sleep or if sitting to eat, watch a show.
- You may take it off to shower and shave. Do not tilt head back to shampoo or shave.
- Wear the collar when working at the computer/laptop.
- Wear the collar when you are the passenger in a car. Once you start driving, try to wear the collar but loosen it so that you can check your blindspots and drive comfortably.
- When your collar is off it is safe to move your neck in every direction 1-2 inches for the first few weeks. After your first post operative visit, we will allow you to move your neck 2-3 inches in every direction as tolerated when the collar is off.
- It is important to be compliant with the collar until you are fused and healed. Fusion typically takes 2-3 months and will be determined on your follow up x-rays.

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.
- 3 S's - common side effects after surgery: You may experience a *sore throat* and *swallowing difficulty* for a few weeks. Swallowing may feel like a lump in the throat, or may feel clumsy. If swallowing difficulty is severe and you were prescribed a steroid pak (Medrol), start the steroids. If you do not have a steroid pak and are struggling with swallowing, contact the office. Cold, thick liquids through a straw like smoothies, protein drinks, milkshakes can help the first week after surgery with swallowing. Most patients experience some tightness and discomfort between the *shoulder blades* for a few weeks. Use the prescribed muscle relaxers as needed. You can do gentle massage between the shoulders, ice/heat, topicals such as Biofreeze, Tigerbalm, Deep Blue.



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Medication

- If you were given a Medrol Dosepak (steroid/anti-inflammatory medication), take it according to the instructions on 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 needed and as directed on the prescription.
- Pain pills are constipating. Drink plenty of non-caffeine fluids to stay hydrated. Take MiraLax and/or stool softeners (1-2 per day) while on pain pills. If you have not had a bowel movement for several days, try Milk of Magnesia over the counter or a glycerin or dulcolax suppository.
- You may have been 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 taking pain pills or muscle relaxers.**
- DO NOT take anti-inflammatory medication after surgery for several months or until cleared by the doctor (such as ibuprofen, Aleve, Celebrex, meloxicam). NSAIDs can impair or slow bone healing/fusion.
- Medications will be refilled during normal business hours (8:30 am – 5:00 pm, Mon – Thurs and 8:30 am – 12:30 pm Fri) as the physician on call cannot renew prescriptions. Notify the office 24 hours in advance for refills.

Activity

First Week:

- Limit auto travel. Passenger only, no driving.
- Limit lifting to 10 pounds until approved by the doctor to increase it.
- Walk in your house as tolerated. Get your legs moving with short walks several times each day. Do not lay around in bed all day but do not overdo it!
- Do not reach for objects above your head, drink from a can, or do movements that require you to extend your neck.
- Avoid house and yard work. You may cook but do not lift more than 10 pounds.
- No sexual activity.
- Take a nap or at least rest in the morning and again in the afternoon.
- You may lie on your back or your side, really any position that is comfortable to sleep. Your neck will likely feel best in a neutral position – you can try a travel pillow, regular supportive pillow, small rolled blanket/towel behind the small of your neck for comfort.

Second Week:

- Start short walks outside, 1 to 2 blocks, several times a day at first then increase as tolerated. Do not overdo it! Do not get hot and sweaty for the first two weeks as sweat may infect the incision(s).
- No driving. Passenger only.



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Third Week:

- You may be up and about, as tolerated.
- Increase walking distance as tolerated.
- Begin light housework. Stop for frequent breaks. Use good body mechanics. Ensure your collar is on when your neck is vulnerable.
- You may now drive if you feel safe and comfortable behind the wheel and if you are off prescription pain medication.

Other

- The most dangerous but extremely rare risk of cervical surgery is the development of internal bleeding. This can put pressure on the spinal cord or nerves and cause paralysis or breathing difficulty. The potential complication can be treated by reopening the incision and removing the blood, usually a clot. This is why post operative precautions must be taken.
- Use the incentive spirometer (plastic breathing device) from the hospital to take deep breaths several times per day the first week or two home.
- You do not need to keep wearing compression socks after hospital discharge but keep your legs moving to help prevent blood clots.
- We will request a bone growth stimulator (painless device that you wear 30 minutes per day to promote bone fusion) from your insurance company but it is rarely covered for this type of surgery. If approved by insurance, you will be notified from our office several weeks after surgery on how to use it and how to retrieve it.
- You will see a physical therapist while you are in the hospital. Not all patients need physical therapy after the hospital, but we will prescribe it when needed or requested. It will usually benefit patients who are returning to a very physical job or those who had baseline gait difficulties or weakness before surgery. This can be discussed at your first post operative visit.
- You can resume sexual activity as tolerated when you are 3-4 weeks out from surgery.
- 1 month out from surgery you can increase low impact exercise (walking, stationary bike, elliptical with no significant incline or resistance, swimming). You may use light weight dumbbells at higher repetitions if desired (15 lbs or less). Light stretching is okay. Avoid movements that stress or hurt your neck.

Return to Work

Return to work varies with the type of occupation and will be discussed at your follow-up appointment. Most patients can resume work from home/computer work in 1-2 weeks and back to the office on light duty (no heavy lifting) at 3-4 weeks.



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Call Our Office

If you ...

- Feel severe pain, new weakness or numbness in your leg(s) or arm(s).
- Notice excessive drainage, pus drainage, swelling, or increased redness around your incision.
- Have a fever of 101.5°F or greater.
- Have a new problem controlling your bladder or bowel.
- Have difficulty breathing or severe trouble swallowing.

Follow-Up Appointment

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

Contact Number

Office: 214-750-3646