

Cervical Surgery Post-Operative Instructions

Immediate post-op general instructions

- It is **normal** to have a *mild sore throat, difficulty swallowing and/or hoarseness* for **several weeks**. Over-the-counter throat lozenges are helpful. *if the condition worsens*, contact your physician.
- If you have **severe difficulty breathing, feel tightness in your throat or inability to swallow** you may have an **airway compromise** and it is a *medical emergency*. **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION AT ONCE.**
- When sitting, use a straight back chair to ensure proper support, but *do not sit for more than a half hour at a time*. You may increase your sitting time slowly.
- You can expect to be tired post-operative, **nap if necessary**.
- You may lay on your back or side, but *not your stomach*.
- Avoid housework, especially vacuuming and sweeping.
- It is okay to cook, but do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds, and no bending, twisting, or stooping.
- You will wear a hard-cervical collar as directed by your physician.
- **If your pain increases this is a red flag telling you to REST.**
- ***Do not engage in strenuous activity*** for at least **10 weeks**.

1st week post-operative

- You may ride in a vehicle as a passenger, but **no driving**, and **no extended road trips**. Limit your *time in the car to less than 20 minutes*, if possible.
- Walk around your home on a smooth, flat surface. *Try to be up and moving for half of the day*.
- You may use the stairs with assistance.
- ***DO NOT lift anything over 10 pounds.***
- Take pain medication *as directed*. Don't try to "tough it out". You will heal quicker if you feel better.
- Refrain from sexual activity for 3 weeks.

2nd week post-operative

- ***Be sure to attend your first post-op appointment.*** You may discuss when to return to work with your doctor at this time, that will be a patient specific.
- An exercise program will be discussed at your first visit.
- It will be **okay to drive if you are off all pain medication** and feeling strong.
- Increase your *walking to 1 mile per day* if tolerated well.

- You may do light housework, but still no vacuuming or sweeping.

3rd week post-operative

- You may resume sexual activity if you are relatively pain free.
- You may **increase walking time** and house work as tolerated.
- If you need to lift anything, **do not exceed 25 pounds, and use proper body mechanics.**
- You may use a hot tub or spa **IF your incision has healed well and there is no remaining scabs.**

General Post-Operative Information and Instructions Following Cervical Surgery

Pain

It is completely *normal* to have **pain, muscle spasms, numbness, or tingling** after surgery.

These symptoms should **gradually resolve as your muscles and nerves heal.**

Numbness and tingling are usually the last symptoms to resolve because nerves take the longest to heal (*weeks to months*). Applying gentle ice packs for the first 5 days to the incision site will help decrease swelling and pain.

- It is also **common to have a sore throat** because you have had endotracheal intubation. **This tenderness should resolve within a few days.**
- It is **also common to have difficulty swallowing, hoarseness and/or a sore throat** for *several weeks* after cervical surgery. Over-the-counter throat lozenges are helpful.

If **the condition worsens**, contact your physician.

Care of incision

" **Keep the incision clean and dry for 10 days.** There is *no need to change the dressing* unless it becomes wet or soiled.

- The dressing can be permanently **removed 7-10 days after surgery.** **Leave the steri-strips on until they fall off on their own. DO NOT pull them off.**

• In the first 10 days, **you can shower with a waterproof dressing, but no baths**, to avoid getting the incision wet.

It is **not uncommon to have a small amount of clear, yellowish drainage, some bruising, redness, and/or swelling around the incision.**

- **Sutures will dissolve** and no additional care is needed after the steri-strips fall off. **- If you have serious swelling, redness, excessive draining, or fevers** (see below) please call our office right away.

Fever and infections

- ***Low-grade fever is common the first few days after surgery***, but infections this early are **very rare**.
- If you develop a low fever (101) in the first couple days be sure to do deep breathing, get up and move around the house (slowly and carefully) and continue to track your temperature.
- ***IF you have a fever over 101 that persists beyond a couple of days, call the office.***

Call our office if ...

- Drainage from the wound **increases or changes in color or appearance** i.e becomes **creamy or cloudy**.
- **Pain increases** dramatically.
- **Swelling increases** dramatically.
- **Have a fever over 101.**

Brace

- ***Wear your brace at all times*** when you are out of bed, except to use the bathroom- ***unless otherwise instructed by your physician.***
- Continue to wear your brace until you are told by your physician that it may be discontinued.*** This will range from **4-12 weeks** after surgery.

Neck/ Shoulder/ Arm Pain

- You may have notice ***continuing, or increased shoulder or arm pain, or some pain may return the first 5-7 days following surgery.*** This is usually cause by **inflammation and swelling around the nerves.** ***YOU SHOULD NOT BE ALARMED*** as this is ***NORMAL*** and ***COMMON*** until the nerves heal. ***This should diminish within 8 weeks after surgery.***

Constipation

- **Decreased activity** and the use of **pain medications** following surgery may lead to constipation.
 - **Drink lots of liquids** and eat foods high in fiber.
 - If you become constipated, ***you can take over the counter stool softeners*** such as **Colace** or laxatives such as **Dulcolax, Miralax, and Metamucil.** ***Your pharmacist may also have suggestions for resolving constipation.***
- " Please call our office and speak with a nurse if you have any questions or concerns.***

Thrombophlebitis/blood clots

- ***Blood clots are a potential complication of spine surgery.***
- These are common symptoms you should watch for: ***redness, swelling, pain or tenderness in the calf, groin, or behind the knee.***
- If you have ANY of these symptoms DO NOT rub or exercise the affected area, as this may dislodge the clot.
- ***This may require you to go to the emergency room***
- ***IF YOU HAVE SHORTNESS OF BREATH OR CHEST PAINS, GO TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM*** as this could be a blood clot in your lungs and ***IS LIFE THREATENING.***