

Lumbar Surgery Post-Operative Instructions

Immediate post-op general instructions

- 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*.
- For sleeping or lying down use only a firm mattress, ***no couches or reclining chairs.***
- *You may lay on your side or back but not your stomach.*
- " You can expect to be tired post-operative, nap if necessary.
- 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.
- ***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 Lumbar 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.

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.
- You will have a blue running stitch in which the nurse will remove at your first postoperative appointment.
- ***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 deconfined. This will range from 4-12 weeks after surgery.*

Leg pain

You may have some *continuing, or increased leg pain, or some pain may return the first 5-7 days following surgery.* This is usually caused 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.**