

# Spine Surgery

Take home instructions

## Going Home

The sooner you become active, the sooner you will get back to your normal routine. At the same time, you need to protect your healing back. Increase your activity level at a slow but steady pace. You may also see a physical therapist during this time. Follow any guidelines your doctor or physical therapist gives you.

### For Your Safety

- Move household items you need within reach.
- You may have been told to stop a medicine, such as a blood thinner, before surgery. If so, make sure you know what date to restart it.
- During the first few days, take extra time and care when going up and down stairs to avoid a fall. It is best to have a bed on the main level of your home.
- Remove electrical cords, throw rugs, and anything else that may cause you to fall.
- Use a walker or handrails until your balance and strength improve. Remember to ask for help from others when you need it.
- Free up your hands so that you can use them to keep balance. Be sure not to carry too much at once.
- Do not lift anything heavier than 5 to 10 pounds for the first 2 weeks after surgery.
- Do not sit for long periods of time. Take frequent short walks. They are the key to your recovery.
- Do not drive until your doctor says it is okay. Never drive while you are taking opioid pain medicine.
- Nap if you are tired, but do not stay in bed all day.
- Use chairs with arms. The arms make it easier for you to stand up and sit down.
- If you have not yet received instructions about physical therapy, ask your doctor about them.

### Your First Few Weeks

You'll likely feel weak and tired at first, but you should feel a little stronger each day. Your incision (cut) may be sore. You may also feel some pain, tingling, or numbness in your back or legs. These symptoms should decrease as your nerves heal. Keep moving as much as you can without making your pain worse. You may take pain medicine as needed, but do not take more than prescribed.

## Your Walking Program

Walking is the best exercise for you after spine surgery. It makes your muscles stronger, increases your strength, and relieves stress. Start by walking around the house. Build up to several walks a day. You may find it helpful to set a goal. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about setting a safe, realistic goal for yourself.

## Preventing Setbacks

If your pain gets worse for more than 2 hours after an activity, you may have done too much too soon. When you feel pain, slow down and pay more attention to your posture and movements. You should be well on the road to recovery by around the sixth week after your surgery. Think of pain as a warning to slow down.

## Caring for Your Body

### Incision Care

- Leave the bandage (dressing) in place until you are told to remove it or change it. Change it only as directed, using clean hands. Do not leave a bandage on for longer than your surgical team recommends.
- If you have sutures or staples, make sure you have a follow up appointment to have them removed. This should be 2 -3 weeks.
- Check your incision (cut) each day for redness, swelling, or larger amount of drainage.
- Always wash your hands before and after touching your incision.
- Keep your incision clean and dry.
- Avoid doing things that could cause dirt or sweat to get on your incision.
- Don't pick at scabs. They help protect the wound.
- Don't soak your wound in water (no hot tubs, bathtubs, swimming pools) until your doctor says it's okay.
- You may shower when your doctor says it is okay. Avoid running water on your incision.
- Pat your incision dry if it gets wet. Don't rub.
- Change your dressing if it gets wet or soiled.

## Preventing and Treating Constipation

Constipation (can't poop) can happen after surgery and has many causes.

### Symptoms include:

- Stomach pain
- Bloating
- Vomiting
- Painful bowel movements (poop)
- Itching, swelling, bleeding, or pain around the anus

### Ways to prevent and treat constipation:

- Increase your fiber intake through your diet or by using fiber supplements
- Follow your walking program
- Drink fluids
- Over-the-counter medicine

## Other Home Care

- You may have been told to use nonslip bathmats, grab bars, a raised toilet seat, or a shower chair in your bathroom. Use these as you are told to.
- Wear your support stockings if these were given to you in the hospital.
- Wear your brace, if one was prescribed, as ordered by your doctor.
- Do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen until your doctor says it is okay. They may slow or stop your spine from healing like it should.
- If you smoke, follow the plan that you and your surgeon discussed before surgery. Remember, smoking will slow your healing. Stopping is one of the most important things you can do to heal.

## When to Call Your Healthcare Provider

Call your doctor right away if you:

- Feel new or worse severe pain, weakness, or numbness in your neck, back, arms, or legs.
- Have redness, swelling, foul odor or large amount of drainage from your incision.
- Have a fever or severe headache.
- Have trouble breathing or chest pain.
- Have problems controlling your bladder or bowels.
- Have swelling, pain, redness, or tenderness in your calf, ankle, or foot.

*This information should not take the place of professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.*



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