

Discharge Instructions After Cervical Spine Surgery

Medication for pain

A moderate amount of pain is normal after surgery. Take your pain medications as prescribed by your surgeon. If you need a refill, call your surgeon at least three days before you run out of the medicine.

- Do not operate machinery or drink alcohol while using narcotic pain medications.
- Do not take aspirin or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Aleve®) unless your doctor recommends it.
- Some patients get muscle spasms. To lessen the spasm, apply an ice compress for 20 minutes, followed by a heat compress for 20 minutes, then 20 minutes of no compress.
- Sometimes an additional muscle relaxer is needed. Call your surgeon's office if you have unrelieved pain.

Diet

You may have some trouble swallowing solid foods at first. Start with softer foods and advance to regular food, as you are able.

Pain medications can cause constipation. Remember to drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day. Increase fruits, vegetables and fiber. If this does not help, your pharmacist can recommend a laxative.

Elastic hose/TED stockings

If special stockings are ordered, your surgeon will tell you how long to wear them.

Exercise/therapy

If the physical therapist or occupational therapist gave you exercises, continue to do the exercise program.

Incision care

- It is normal to have a slightly red, swollen incision. A small amount of drainage may be present.
- If you have a dressing, keep it dry. Change your dressing once a day. You may remove your dressing when there is no drainage.
- Do not apply lotions, ointments or creams to your incision.
- Keep your incision covered to keep it dry while showering, until the fifth day after surgery.
- If your incision is closed with steri-strips (small pieces of tape over the incision), you may remove them 7 to 10 days after surgery if they have not yet fallen off.
- No bathing or soaking in a hot tub until your surgeon says it's okay.

Activity

- Avoid lifting over 10 pounds. Use comfort as your guide for any other activity. If it hurts, don't do it.
- Walk at least 10 minutes a day (no running). You may walk stairs.
- Do not drive until told to do so by your doctor. You may be a passenger.

If you were given a cervical collar, be sure it is snug enough. Your chin should not be able to slip to the inside of it. Use a mirror to assist in positioning the collar. Avoid neck twisting or nodding, as the collar does not prevent all motion.

When your collar is off, avoid tipping your chin down onto your chest or turning your head from side to side. Drinking through a straw may help prevent neck motion. Your doctor will tell you how long you need to wear your collar.

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Sleep

Do not sleep on your stomach. You may sleep on your back or on your non-graft side with a small pillow under your head.

Sexual activity

Sexual activity is not harmful after surgery if you avoid strain or twisting to the neck and back. You should be the partner on the bottom.

Do not smoke

Smoking has been found to decrease blood flow and healing. If you smoke, we recommend that you stop. The nurses can give you information on quitting if you are interested.

**If you feel you have an emergency,
go to the Emergency Room.**

Call 911 if you have:

- **Chest pain**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Any other life-threatening condition**

Call your surgeon if you have any of these symptoms:

- Your incision becomes red, swollen or warm.
- The drainage from the incision changes from spotty to continuous.
- The drainage from the incision is thick or foul smelling.
- You have a fever of 101 °F degrees or higher.
- You are unable to empty your bladder.
- The pain gets progressively worse, or a new pain develops, or your pain is not controlled by pain medication.
- Your leg is swollen and painful.