



Neurosurgical Associates of Southwestern CT

BRAIN & SPINE SPECIALISTS

Post-Operative Instructions - Lumbar Surgery with Fusion

The following is a list of instructions for your convalescence, following your back surgery. These represent general instructions to be used as guidelines. They may be modified for an individual patient.

1. The surgical procedure you had was performed in conjunction with another surgeon or physician assistant. Post-operative questions can be addressed with either surgeon. This team approach leads to better patient care and outcome.
2. No lifting, pushing or pulling of objects greater than 10-15 pounds and no strenuous activity.
3. When getting object off the floor, bend at the knees and NOT at the waist. Hold on to the back of a chair or counter when bending.
4. Do not twist the spine in any way. In order to avoid twisting your spine in bed at night, use a pillow between your legs and pillows at your sides to avoid rolling over onto your stomach.
5. Use a straight back chair or a fairly rigid recliner for sitting, preferably something with arms. Do not use low or soft cushioned chairs for sitting, as they offer very little support.
6. You are not to drive for the first 10 days following surgery. You can ride in a car for short distances up to 20 minutes after 5 days following your operation.
7. In the first 10 days to 2 weeks, do not sit more than 45 minutes to 1 hour at any one time. Over the next six weeks gradually increase the duration and frequency that is comfortable for you. Pre-operative symptoms and increased back pain may occur with prolonged sitting.
8. No back exercises will be done in the first 4 weeks. As you progress it will be determined by your surgeon when you can start an exercise program or physiotherapy. Formal physiotherapy, abdominal exercises and strengthening programs will be started when it appears healing is well underway.
9. Walking is the best activity to improve your overall fitness and endurance. This is started very early on following your surgery. You can begin with short trips and increase your time and distance. Begin with 10 minutes and slowly progress to walking 20-30 minutes 3-4 times a day.
10. You may climb stairs from the very beginning, but start slowly and use the handrail. It is advisable the first day or two, to have someone climb the stairs with you to ensure that you are comfortable and stable.
11. Return to work will be discussed at your post-operative visit. It usually occurs between the 3rd and 4th week following your operation.

12. In most cases dissolvable sutures have been used for your incision. The incision is covered with Steri-strips and gauze dressing that protects the wound. The dressing is usually a water resistant dressing. You may shower at home after surgery. The water resistant dressing will keep the wound dry. Before you are discharged from the hospital, the nurse will provide you with further instructions regarding the care of your wound. Do not submerge in water for at least 3 weeks after surgery.
13. If staples or non-dissolvable sutures have been used, you will need to be seen at our office within 10-14 days from surgery to have them removed.
14. In addition to the soft tissue that must heal following the surgery, we are also waiting for the bone to mesh together to form a solid fusion. During this time you should be careful when bending and twisting your back.
15. Prior to your first post-operative office visit you will need to have an X-ray taken of your lumbar spine with which the surgeon will use to assess the positioning of your hardware. The prescription for the X-ray will be included in your surgical packet given to you or mailed to you prior to surgery.
16. Medications may include pain relievers and analgesics to control pain, although they may cause drowsiness and constipation. They may also be habit forming and you may want to consider the amount of pain medication you are taking. You may also consider taking multivitamins with iron on a daily basis for a few weeks post-operatively.
17. Constipation is a common side effect of some pain medications so it is important to drink plenty of liquids and eat a diet high in fiber. You may need to take a stool softener for a short time while taking pain medication, but avoid strong laxatives. Consider Milk of Magnesia, Metamucil, Fibercon, Citrucel or other mild laxatives.
18. Please call the office if you are in need of any prescription refills. Be sure to call during business hours on Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Prescription renewal by phone may require 48 hours to refill. Please be aware that prescriptions for narcotics will not be provided by a covering (on-call) surgeon.
19. Report any increase in post-operative pain, fever, chills, drainage, swelling of the wound or any redness of the wound immediately to our office. If there is drainage, note the color, amount and consistency. Also call us if you are having headaches. Do not hesitate to call if you have any questions.
20. Each individual situation is different and therefore requires individualized attention. Feel free to ask questions during your office visits. Write down your questions before you come into the office so you don't forget anything.
21. CAUTION: It is well known that smoking severely slows down the healing process for all patients with low back surgery. Nicotine can adversely affect the rate of fusion and recurrent disc herniation.