

POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS: SPINE SURGERY

WOUND CARE, DRESSINGS AND SHOWERING

If you had a smaller surgery, you will notice dissolvable sutures on the surface. For larger surgeries, there will also be sutures that need to be taken off in the office. Over your incision, there will be a larger dressing that should be kept in place until you shower. Some mild drainage on the dressing is normal for most patients.

You are allowed to shower 2 days after surgery. Simply remove your dressing and shower normally. Wash your incision like normal skin but do not scrub the incision. Do not apply any creams or lotions. After the incision is dry, simply apply a clean dressing over the incision for comfort. You can do this for about 1 week. It can be normal to have mild blood stained drainage on the dressing for a few days after surgery. If the drainage increases over time or becomes foul smelling contact the office immediately. If you had a drain placed, the drain site may have some drainage for a day or two after the drain is removed. You will return to the office at 3-4 weeks after surgery for a wound check and to start physical therapy

Until cleared by the surgeon:

- Do not use a hot tub, Jacuzzi, swimming pool, bath or submerge yourself in any other body of water.
- Do not apply in creams, lotions or ointments.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

You will be evaluated by a physical therapist before discharge from the hospital. The physical therapist will assist you in ambulating, with or without the use of a walker. Depending on what was arranged, you will begin physical therapy either at home or as an outpatient. If you had a small surgery, physical therapy after spine surgery is optional and typically started after the first post-operative visit. For spine fusion procedures, outpatient physical therapy is usually started 6 weeks after surgery.

BRACING, WEIGHTBEARING AND ACTIVITY

Dr. Verma encourages patients to walk 3 times a day to improve the stiffness of the muscles surrounding the surgical area. Walking also prevents blood clots, improves digestion, and improves muscle spasms. There will be no restriction on the amount of walking you can do, unless otherwise specified. As you progress in physical therapy, your activity levels will increase.

If you had a cervical fusion, you be given a collar to wear for 6 weeks. This collar is to protect you and should be worn at all times even while sleeping. You may remove the collar to shower or to eat. Six weeks after a cervical fusion, the collar will be removed and you will be able to start physical therapy. For all lumbar spine surgeries, no bending, lifting over 10 pounds, or twisting for the first 6 weeks following surgery. After 6 weeks, begin to slowly incorporate more activity.

Patients undergoing a lumbar fusion will be given a brace for the first 6 weeks following surgery and should be worn when out of bed. Recovery for a lumbar fusion can approximately 3 months. For patients undergoing scoliosis surgery, the brace should be worn for 3 months and the recovery can sometimes take up to 6 months. Some patients will also be prescribed a bone stimulator. Ask for specific instructions on the use of a bone stimulator. Typically, patients undergoing smaller surgery can return to driving 2 weeks after surgery. For fusion surgeries, return to driving will be at about 6 weeks from surgery.

PAIN MANAGEMENT, ICING AND SWELLING

A prescription for pain medication will be given following surgery. Keep in mind that the pain medication may alter your ability to drive, and it is illegal to do so while on the medication. Also, do not make major life decisions while taking the pain medication as you may be impaired.

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Icing the back is a great way to reduce pain and inflammation while also reducing the need of pain medication and speeding up the recovery process. You are encouraged to ice multiple times a day. Never apply ice directly over the skin, wrap the ice around a small towel and apply it for 20 minutes at a time. Always ice after physical therapy and exercise for weeks following surgery. Walking regularly will also prevent spasms and help with reduction of pain and swelling.

POST-OPERATIVE VISIT

You will see your surgeon 3 to 4 weeks following surgery for your first post-op visit. If you have any questions or concerns before then, call the office to speak to our on-call provider who can assist you. Many spine patients may notice some mild numbness in the region of the incision or in the arms/legs following surgery. This typically subsides after several weeks. Signs and symptoms to look out for include fever over 101°, difficulties breathing, increased pain and swelling to the calves, purulent drainage (thick white or green in color or foul smelling) coming from the wound, or the wound has increase in redness. If you notice worsening pain or weakness, bowel or bladder incontinence, or have a high fever please contact our office immediately.