

DR. BERNBECK POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS: POSTERIOR CERVICAL FUSION

WOUND CARE, DRESSINGS AND SHOWERING

You will have a breathable membrane dressing covering your neck incision. If you notice that your dressing becomes soaked underneath, give our office a call and we will arrange for you to come to the office to change the dressing. Bruising and swelling to the surrounding area is common after surgery. At the time of discharge from the hospital, you will either be cleared to shower and splash the dressing wet, or you will be given instructions to keep it dry:

- If you are cleared to shower at the time of discharge, it is ok to splash the area wet and gently pat it dry.
- If instructed, at the time of discharge, not to get the surgical site wet, you can clean other areas of your body with a washcloth (sponge bath) but do not get the dressing wet. A few days after surgery, you will have an appointment in the office for a dressing change. The new dressing will consist of a breathable membrane without gauze. 24 hours after this dressing has been applied, you can splash it wet in the shower, but do not soak it in a bathtub or pool. Gently pat the area dry.

Regardless of whether you are cleared to shower or not, 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 any creams, lotions or ointments over the incision. (this will usually be the instruction for the first 2-3 weeks after surgery)

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 the week following your surgery.

BRACING, WEIGHTBEARING AND ACTIVITY

There will be no restriction on the amount of weight you can put on your legs, but your balance and stability may not be back to normal and part of the physical therapy will focus on stabilizing you when you walk. You should hold your head still. Do not move your head or neck during the initial healing process. You will have a cervical collar, and this will help you to remember to keep your head still. It is ok to remove the cervical collar for short periods of time to let the skin breathe and to clean the neck area, but it is important to keep your head still, even when the collar is off. The pads of the collar may be removed to be laundered. This can be done either by hand or in a washing machine on gentle cycle. The pads should be either air dried or in a dryer on a low temperature setting. As you progress in physical therapy, your activity levels will increase. Home exercises will be given with the goal of getting you walking safely as well as using stairs and getting on and off of chair, sofa and bed. There will be advice on using the toilet and shower. If you have a walk-in shower, this is better to use after surgery rather than a bathtub. In some cases, a shower chair greatly eases the process of showering.

PAIN MANAGEMENT, ICING AND SWELLING

A prescription for pain medication will be given following surgery. Keep in mind that the pain medication often impairs your ability to drive safely, and it is illegal to do so while on this medication. Also, do not make major life decisions while taking the pain medication as you may be impaired. Icing the neck 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 the neck multiple times a day. Never apply ice directly over the skin, wrap a small dry towel around the bagged ice or icepack or a bag of frozen peas and apply it to the neck for 20 minutes at a time. The goal is to chill the surgical area, but keep it dry. Always ice after physical therapy and exercise for weeks following surgery.

BLOOD CLOT PREVENTION

After spinal surgery we try to avoid the use of blood thinners to avoid bleeding at the surgical site, so it is important to pump the calves frequently to increase blood circulation to the legs and to prevent clots. The physical therapist will show you how this is done. Walking also prevents the formation of blood clots.

POST-OPERATIVE VISIT

Your first post-op visit will be to assess the incision and to monitor your early recovery. If you have any questions or concerns before this appointment, call the office to speak to our on-call provider who can assist you. Signs and symptoms to look out for include fever over 102°, difficulties breathing, increased pain and swelling to the calves, purulent drainage (thick white or green in color) from the wound, or the wound has increase in redness.