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Home Instructions Following Anterior Cervical Fusion

The key to successful recovery from spine surgery is to gradually resume activities. The goal of treatment is to have you return to a full range of work and leisure activities that may not have been possible before your surgery. It is very important that you remember the basic principles of back care and incorporate these into your daily activities as you recover. Resuming activities on a gradual basis, eating a balanced diet, and not smoking are all very important activities for a successful recovery. This will help you recover and prevent future problems.

Activity

Wear cervical collar at all times for 5-7 days after your surgery. It immobilizes and protects the neck while the soft tissues and bone begin to heal. You may take your collar off for short periods of time if you like. If you need longer duration of immobilization we will discuss it with you.

You can begin to gently start turning the neck while in the collar. We will instruct you further at the time of surgery if you will be required to wear the collar longer.

Avoid bending and lifting more than 10 pounds.

Walk as much as possible. Walking increases your heart rate while increasing the blood flow to your fusion, thus promoting healing. Walking is a weight bearing activity, which stimulates bone growth. Increase the amount of walking daily, up to one mile a day within the first 4-6 weeks after surgery.

Riding as a passenger is allowed at any time. Do not drive for the first 5-7 days after surgery. Do not drive when taking narcotic pain medicine.

We will instruct you on return to work.

Pain

Pain is expected and will undoubtedly increase with increasing activity.

If you develop signs of muscle weakness or increase pain, numbness, or tingling in any or all of your four extremities and/or loss of control of your bowels or bladder (incontinence), call the office immediately or go to the emergency room if it is after hours.

Take your pain medication as prescribed, when needed. Pain medication can cause constipation. Over-the-counter laxatives can be purchased at any pharmacy. Call the office during regular hours for refills. Do not wait to call until you run out. Pain medication cannot be refilled on weekends or holidays.

Do not resume any types of anti-inflammatories for 6-8 weeks after surgery. Examples are Aleve and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Naprosyn etc.) They may cause bleeding and delay or reduce healing of the fusion. You can however resume aspirin and Plavix (if prescribed) the day after the operation. If you are on blood thinners, we will discuss that with you.

Incision Care

No showering for 3-5 days after surgery. It is preferred that the incision be kept dry during this time to reduce the risk of infection. Sponge bath is recommended for the first few days unless otherwise instructed.

The incision must be checked for a few days after discharge from the hospital. Inspect the incision daily for signs and symptoms of infection. Drainage should be minimal. Look for redness, swelling, and pus. Notify the office of these signs of infection and/or if your temperature is above 101 degrees.

Diet

There is no special diet necessary, although, since calories and protein are needed for healing, weight reduction diets are not advisable at this time.

Smoking

Research shows that fusions do not heal as well or as often in patients who smoke. Therefore, every attempt should be made to stop smoking.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapy may be recommended approximately 6 weeks after surgery if necessary.