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## **Home Instructions Following Lumbar Surgery**

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**

Walking is a low-impact activity that promotes a healthy cardiovascular status while keeping your leg muscles strong. Walk as much as possible, gradually increasing the amount of walking you do each day. Try to walk up to one mile a day within 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. If you were very active before surgery this may be quite easy, whereas if you were relatively inactive before surgery, a mile a day may be a bit too much.

If you were given a brace it should be worn when you are up and about to give that area support while the bone is healing. Typically the brace is worn for about 4 weeks. Brace wear is not necessary in bed or at night time.

Use common sense to protect your back and avoid things that required bending, twisting, or staying in prolonged "stooped posture". Avoid lifting more than 10 pounds.

Sitting is restricted for 4-6 weeks after surgery. When you sit, all your weight rests on your low back and buttocks. This can cause the nerves to become irritated after surgery and increase your pain. It is therefore recommended that sitting be limited to less than an hour at a time. If you need to sit for longer than an hour (for example, a long car ride), you should get up and change positions frequently. After the surgery, you may experience some numbness or tingling in your legs intermittently. This is not uncommon and will decrease as you heal. As a result, driving should be avoided for about the first 4-6 weeks after surgery. Then, when you feel you have good enough control of your legs and are off all narcotic pain medicines, you may resume driving. Your seatbelt is extremely important after surgery to minimize any sudden jolts or trauma to your back.

Return to work status is individualized and we will discuss that with you.

### **Pain**

When you go home, although you may not realize it, you are typically more active than when you were in the hospital. As a result, you may experience more pain at home. Take your pain medicine as prescribed when needed. It is important not to take the pain medication in combination with alcohol, since both have the effect of making you drowsy, which can be dangerous. As your body heals, you will need less pain medications. We will gradually reduce the strength of the pain medicines as you heal. It is important to listen to your body and use techniques other than medicine alone to relieve pain. Reduce activities such as sitting, and lie down to help relieve pain. You may use acetaminophen (Tylenol) instead of prescription pain medicine for less severe pain. You should be comfortable with over-the-counter pain medicine after about 4 to 6 weeks. You may also ice your back when laying on your side.

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 if you've had fusion surgery. Examples are Aleve and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, Naprosyn etc.). They may cause bleeding and delay or reduce healing of the fusion. You may take your prescription aspirin the day after surgery.

If you develop signs of muscle weakness or increased 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.

### **Incision Care**

You should not shower for 5 days after surgery. After that time you can put a protective plastic covering and take a shower. It is important that you keep your incision completely dry to reduce the risk of infection. With all wounds, any redness, drainage, swelling, tenderness, or elevations in body temperature above 101 degrees could be a sign of possible infection. If any of these signs occur, it should be reported to your doctor or nurse. Change your dressings once every other day or more often if necessary.

### **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. Initially, aquatic therapy is prescribed for 4-6 weeks followed by regular land therapy for an additional 4-6 weeks.