

Discharge Instructions – Cervical Spine

****Please call our office and schedule your post-surgery appointment for 2-3 weeks after surgery. If however you have staples or sutures that need to be removed schedule an appointment for removal 7-10 days after surgery****

Activity:

- Shift positions frequently and avoid long periods of standing or lying down.
- Walk at least three times a day. Gradually increase your distance and add light activities each day but stop immediately if your pain increases dramatically.
- Limit your neck range of motion to 45 degrees.
- Do not do any neck exercises for 6 weeks or until cleared by your neurosurgeon.
- No lifting, pushing, pulling or overhead reaching/lifting of object over 5-10 pounds (a gallon of milk weighs 8.5 pounds) and no strenuous activity.
- Do not drive if you are taking pain medications, muscle relaxants, or if you are in pain.
- Do not drive for at least 1 week after surgery. Note that prolonged sitting in a car may exacerbate neck or arm symptoms.
- You can return to work when you feel ready. However, you must stay within the 5-10 pound weight lifting restriction and start with light duties. Always check with your neurosurgeon prior to returning to work.
- Formal physiotherapy and strengthening programs will be started only when it appears healing is well underway, typically at the 6 week mark.
- You may resume sexual activity when this is comfortable for you.

Wound Care:

- In most cases dissolvable sutures have been used for you incision so they will not need to be removed and incision is covered with dermabond glue which will keep your incision closed.
- If you do have staples or sutures that are not dissolvable these staples or sutures will have to be removed 7-10 days following surgery. **Please call our office to schedule removal.**
- You may shower 24 hours after surgery but be careful not to let water directly hit your incision. Also take care when drying to tap dry around the incision and not to rub or irritate the incision.
- The water proof dressing should fall off in 1-3 days but don't force it.
- Keep the incision clean and dry and make sure you clean your hands before and after touching the incision.
- Clean your incision only with soap and water. Do not use alcohol based solutions.
- **Do not** soak the incision in a bathtub or pool for 6 weeks unless cleared by your physician.
- **Do not** put any ointments, creams, or lotions on the incision.

Pain/ Post-operative symptoms:

- You will have some pain at the incision and soreness of the muscles of the neck. Some pain is normal as you resume your daily activities and will improve with time.
- You may have some nerve irritation and incisional swelling over the first 2 weeks. This is normal and will improve with time. Using ice or heat with a barrier (cloth) protecting your skin three times a day will be helpful.
- You may have some difficulty swallowing or some irritation/hoarseness in your voice when you speak. This is normal and will improve with time.
- **Caution:** it is well known that smoking severely slows down the healing process for all patients with neck surgery. Nicotine can adversely affect the rate of fusion and recurrent disc herniation.

Medication:

- Pain medication may be prescribed but only take if needed.
- **Do not** use alcohol while taking pain medication.
- Pain medications may cause constipation so an over the counter stool softener is encouraged (try Dulcolax, Milk of Magnesia or Correctol at first and Magnesium Citrate or Fleets enema if needed).
- Upon discharge you will be given a limited supply of pain medications. To avoid delay or interruption in your pain management call our office upon your return home to request a refill. **Please allow at least 24 hours for all refills.** The after-hours doctor on call will not authorize medication refills or prescribe new medication.
- Per law, controlled substances, such as narcotic pain medication cannot be called or faxed to the pharmacy. You or a designated person must either come to our office to collect a script or we can mail it your home address. **Please allow at least 72 hours for controlled substance scripts.**

Call our office if you experience any of the following:

- A temperature of 101F or above.
- Increased redness, soreness, swelling, or foul-smelling drainage in or around incision.
- The incision opens.
- You continue to have extreme pain an hour after taking pain medication.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Shortness of breath.
- Severe difficulty swallowing liquids.
- Any other concerns.

For Patients Having a Fusion:

In addition to the soft tissue that must heal following surgery, we are also waiting for the bone to mesh together and form a solid fusion. This process may take up to 6 months. During this time you should be careful and avoid twisting your neck.