

## **Lumbar Surgery** **Post-Operative Instructions**

### **Immediate post-op general instructions**

- When sitting, use a straight back chair to ensure proper support but ***do not sit for more than a half hour at a time***. You may increase your sitting time *slowly*.
- For sleeping or lying down use only a firm mattress, ***no couches or reclining chairs***.
- *You may lay on your side or back but not your stomach.*
- " You can expect to be tired post-operative, nap if necessary.
- Avoid housework, especially vacuuming and sweeping.
- It is okay to cook, but do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds, and no bending, twisting, or stooping.
- ***If your pain increases this is a red flag telling you to REST.***
- **Do not engage in strenuous activity for at least 10 weeks.**

### **1st week post-operative**

- You may ride in a vehicle as a passenger, but no driving, and no extended road trips. Limit your ***time in the car to less than 20 minutes***, if possible.
- Walk around your home on a smooth, flat surface. ***Try to be up and moving for half of the day.***
- You may use the stairs with assistance.
- ***DO NOT lift anything over 10 pounds.***
- Take pain medication as ***directed***. Don't try to "tough it out". You will heal quicker if you feel better.
- Refrain from sexual activity for 3 weeks.

### **2nd week post-operative**

- ***Be sure to attend your first post-op appointment.*** You may discuss when to return to work with your doctor at this time, that will be a patient specific.
- An exercise program will be discussed at your first visit.
- It will be okay to drive if you are off all pain medication and feeling strong.
- Increase your ***walking to 1 mile per day*** if tolerated well.
- You may do light housework, but still no vacuuming or sweeping.

### **3rd week post-operative**

- You may resume sexual activity if you are relatively pain free.
- You may **increase walking time** and house work as tolerated.

- If you need to lift anything, *do not exceed 25 pounds* and use proper body mechanics.
- You may use a hot tub or spa **IF** your incision has *healed well and there is no remaining scabs*.

### **General Post-Operative Information and Instructions Following Lumbar Surgery**

#### **Pain**

- It is completely **normal** to have pain, muscle spasms, numbness, or tingling after surgery. These symptoms should **gradually resolve** as **your** muscles **and nerves heal**.
- Numbness and tingling are usually the last symptoms to resolve because nerves take the longest to heal (**weeks to months**). Applying gentle ice packs for the first 5 days to the incision site will help decrease swelling and pain.
- It is also **common** to have a **sore throat** because you have had endotracheal intubation. This tenderness should resolve within a few days.

#### **Care of incision**

- Keep the incision clean and dry for 10 days. There is **no need to change the dressing** unless it becomes wet or soiled.

The dressing can be permanently **removed 7-10 days after surgery**.

Leave the steri-strips on until they fall off on their own. **DO Not pull them off.**

In the first 10 days, you can shower with a waterproof dressing, **but no baths**, to avoid getting the incision wet.

- It is not uncommon to have a small amount of clear, yellowish drainage, some bruising, redness, and/or swelling around the incision.
- You will have a blue running stitch in which the nurse will remove at your first postoperative appointment.
- ***If you have serious swelling, redness, excessive draining, or fevers*** (see below) please call our office right away.

#### **Fever and infections**

- ***Low-grade fever is common the first few days after surgery***, but infections this early are very rare.

If you develop a low fever (101) in the first couple days be sure to do deep breathing, get up and move around the house (slowly and carefully) and continue to track your temperature.

- ***If you have a fever over 101 that persists beyond a couple of days, call the office.***

#### **Call our office if ...**

- Drainage from the wound increases or changes in color or appearance i.e becomes creamy or cloudy.
- Pain increases dramatically.
- Swelling increases dramatically.
- Have a fever ***over 101***

#### **Brace**

- ***Wear your brace at all times*** when you are out of bed, except to use the bathroom- ***unless otherwise instructed by your physician.***

- *Continue to wear your brace until you are told by your physician that it may be deconfined.* This will range from 4-12 weeks after surgery.

### **Leg pain**

You may have some *continuing, or increased leg pain, or some pain may return the first 5-7 days following surgery.* This is usually cause by inflammation and swelling around the nerves. *YOU SHOULD NOT BE ALARMED* as this is *NORMAL* and *COMMON* until the nerves heal. *This should diminish within 8 weeks after surgery.*

### **Constipation**

- Decreased activity and the use of pain medications following surgery may lead to constipation.
- Drink lots of liquids and eat foods high in fiber.
- If you become constipated, *you can take over the counter stool* softeners such as Colace or laxatives such as Dulcolax, Miralax, and Metamucil. *Your pharmacist may also have suggestions for resolving constipation.*
- *Please call our office and speak with a nurse if you have any questions or concerns.*

### **Thrombophlebitis/blood clots**

- *Blood clots are a potential complication of spine surgery.*

These are common symptoms you should watch for: *redness, swelling, pain or tenderness in the calf, groin, or behind the knee.*

- If you have ANY of these symptoms-DO NOT rub *or* exercise the affected area, as this may dislodge the clot.
- *This may require you to go to the emergency room.*
- *IF YOU HAVE SHORTNESS OF BREATH OR CHEST PAINS, GO TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM* as this could be a blood clot in your lungs and *IS LIFE THREATENING.*