

Recovery

As you prepare yourself mentally to undergo spinal surgery, you also need to prepare yourself for the recovery period that will follow your operation. While the surgery entails work on the part of the surgeon, after that the brunt of the work is in your hands. To ensure a smooth and healthy recovery, it is important that, as a patient, you closely follow the set of instructions that your surgical team gives you.

Hospital Recovery

After the operation, you will be brought to the recovery room for observation. When you wake up from the anesthesia, you may be slightly disoriented, and not know where you are. The nurses and doctors around you will tell you where you are, and remind you that you have undergone surgery. As the effects of the anesthesia wear off, you will feel very tired, and, at this point, will be encouraged to rest.

Members of your surgical team may ask you to respond to some simple commands, such as "wiggle your fingers and toes" and "take deep breaths." When you awaken, you will be lying on your back, which may seem surprising, if you have had surgery through an incision in the back; however, lying on your back is not harmful to the surgical area.

Prior to the surgery, an intravenous (IV) tube will be inserted into your arm to provide your body with fluids during your hospital stay. The administration of these fluids will make you feel swollen for the first few days after the operation.

When you are aware from the anesthesia, you may feel the urge to urinate. So, in addition to the IV, a catheter tube (also commonly called a Foley Catheter) will be placed into your bladder to drain urine from your system. The catheter serves two purposes: (1) it permits the doctors and nurses to monitor how much urine your body is producing and (2) it eliminates the need for you to get up and go to the bathroom. Once you are able to get up and move around, the catheter will be removed, and you can then use the bathroom normally. Post-Op Day #1.

During your hospital stay you will get additional instructions from your nurses and other members of your surgical teams regarding your diet and activity.

With respect to physical activity, in most cases, your surgeon will want you to get out of bed on the first day after your surgery. Nurses and physical therapists will assist you with this activity until you feel comfortable enough to get up and move around on your own. Ambulating frequently will help your recovery and reduce the risks of unwanted outcomes.

Home Recovery

Before you are discharged from the hospital, your doctor and other members of the hospital staff will give you additional self-care instructions for you to follow at home, a

list of "do's and don'ts" which you will be asked to follow for the first 6 to 8 weeks of your home recovery. So, if you are unsure of any of these instructions, ask for clarification. Following these instructions is crucial to your recovery.

Nowadays, surgery involves one or more incisions depending on the surgical approach used to perform the operation. Therefore, when you are discharged home you may still have a surgical dressing on your incision(s). Either a nurse will visit your home to change the dressing or a caregiver, such as one of your family members will be taught to do it for you. It is important that the dressing be changed daily and kept dry. Keep incision covered until seen.

If any signs of infection are observed while changing the dressing, call your doctor. These signs include:

- Fever – a body temperature greater than 101°F (38°C)
- Drainage from the incision(s)
- Opening of the incision(s)
- Redness or warmth around the incision(s).

In addition, call your doctor if you experience chills, nausea/vomiting, or suffer any type of trauma (e.g. a fall, automobile accident).

During the recovery period you will also be instructed to keep your incision(s) clean, making sure only to use soap and water to cleanse the area after 10 days. You may shower after 5 days unless otherwise instruction.

In addition to caring for your incision(s), you will also be encouraged to:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Maintain a healthy diet – high in protein (e.g. protein shakes.)
- Walk or do deep-breathing exercises
- Gradually increase your physical activity
- ½ hour walk in the morning and ½ hour walk in the evening.

Physical Activity

Daily walking is the best exercise. Try to increase distance a little each day, setting a pace that avoids fatigue or severe pain. You may climb stairs when you feel able. Sexual relations may be resumed during the recovery period, but positions that strain or cause pain should be avoided. "Listen" to your body. Discomfort is normal while you gradually return to normal activity, but pain is a signal to stop what you are doing and proceed more slowly.

Activities to avoid include heavy lifting, bending, or twisting. You should also avoid the use of skin lotion in the area of the incision(s), you need to keep this area dry until it has had the opportunity to heal well.

Working

Your doctor will help determine when you can return to work and with what limitations. If a work release is required, it will be given to you during the first post-operative visit.

Driving

Drive a car only when you have recovered full coordination and are experiencing minimal pain. Do not drive after taking pain medication.

Medication

You should gradually use less pain medication while recovering at home. This can be accomplished by increasing the amount of time between taking pills, then by reducing the number taken each time. A certain amount of discomfort and pain can be expected until the inflammation and nerve sensitivity have subsided. Heat, exercise, massage, and short rest periods will also help relieve pain.