

Post-Operative Instructions For (Neck) Cervical Spine Surgery



We want to make this experience as pleasant as possible for you and your family. If you have any questions before or after your surgery, please contact our office at 303-697-7463.

PLEASE NOTE THAT IN SOME CASES, DUE TO UNFORESEEN EVENTS INCLUDING EMERGENCIES, SCHEDULING CONFLICTS, INSURANCE ISSUES OR ABNORMAL PRE-OP TESTING YOUR SURGERY MAY NEED TO BE POSTPONED OR RESCHEDULED.

Post-Op Pain

It is not unusual to experience the following symptoms in the first few weeks after surgery:

1. Pain in and around the incision(s)
2. Some persistent neck or arm pain
3. Pain between the shoulder blades or across the shoulder area
4. Mild swelling or redness at the incision(s) that is decreasing.
5. Pain on moving from bed to chair or standing position. It is not unusual to be uncomfortable during the first few days following surgery, and especially at night. This will improve steadily.
6. A sore throat that feels like something is caught when you swallow
7. Pain will be present but should be around 3-6 range on a scale of 10 with medications.

Pain Medication

With regard to pain medicine, you will be given a prescription when you are discharged. You may also get a prescription for a muscle relaxant. Take them as needed and directed. **No prescription refills will be called in at night or on weekends.**

Do not begin taking Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs or NSAIDs (Advil, Motrin, Ibuprofen, Nuprin, Alleve, Celebrex, etc.) until Dr. Jatana has approved them. This may be 8-12 weeks after surgery.

You may be prescribed Decadron (a steroid) to take after you are home from the hospital. Take this prescription as directed. You must take the entire prescription. Decadron may cause you to feel nervous or jittery. It may also cause difficulty sleeping. These symptoms will improve once you have finished your prescription.

Incision Care

There are staples, sutures or paper band aids (steri-strips) holding the incision(s) closed. If banked bone was used for the fusion, you will have only one incision at the neck. If your own bone was used, a second incision at the hip will be present.

1. Change the dressing(s) daily for 10 days with 4x4 gauze and tape, or when the dressing is soiled. After that, if there is no drainage, you may remove the dressing. You may either let the incision air dry (**leave the steri-strips in place**) or cover with an oversized Band-Aid. **Redness that is getting worse and/or persistent or cloudy drainage should be reported to our office ASAP.**
2. You may shower 48 hours after surgery. Remove the gauze cover bandage (**leave the steri-strips in place**) **AFTER** showering. Water will not hurt the incision but do not tub bathe or soak the wound. After showering, recover the incision with a clean, dry dressing, but leave the steri-strips in place.
3. Do not apply ointments or solutions to the incision. Mild soap and water are OK.
4. If you notice a small clear suture at the end of the incision, do not remove it. It will either dissolve or be removed in the office.
5. If you develop blisters, redness, or irritation from the tape, discontinue its use.

Do's and Don'ts

You should think of the first week after surgery as an extension of your hospital stay. In general, if any activity increases discomfort, don't do it. It will get easier each day. Your first post op visit will be scheduled 10-14 days after surgery. You will see our Physician Assistant on the first visit and Dr. Jatana at your second post op visit, approximately 4-6 weeks after surgery. An x-ray will be ordered on the day of your first and second post-op visits if you have had a cervical fusion.

1. Wear your collar at all times. You may remove it to shower, wash, shave, etc., move your body as a unit while limiting excessive neck motions. Avoid big 'yes' or 'no' motions with your head. The collar is **not** there to restrict all neck movement. It is there to restrict excessive movement to allow the bone graft to heal. (This may be modified by Dr. Jatana)
2. Following a fusion, you will wear a hard cervical collar for approximately 6 weeks after your surgery. You will then be placed in a soft cervical collar for approximately another 4-6 weeks.

Following a non-fusion surgery (laminotomy, foraminotomy or laminectomy) you will wear a cervical collar for approximately 3-4 weeks. This may vary on a case to case basis. You must wear your brace at all times, with the exception of showering, shaving and may loosen it while eating.
3. Do not use time off after surgery to do projects at home.
4. Do not remain confined to bed during the day. Walk as much as you comfortably can. You may climb stairs. Do not sit or stand for more than 50 minutes at a time. You should move to avoid getting stiff.
5. Avoid lifting more than 10 lbs. for approximately 3 weeks.

6. No exercise program is allowed until you are released by your doctor to do so.
7. Sexual activity is permitted whenever comfort permits.
8. You should not drive with the hard cervical collar, ask your doctor to clarify. You may ride in a car as a passenger. Do not ride for more than 2 hours without getting out and walking for a few minutes.
9. Decisions regarding returning to work and physical therapy needs will be made on an individual basis by our medical staff.
10. The pain medication and anesthesia can cause problems with constipation. Start a stool softener daily, increase your fluids, and walk as tolerated to help with constipation. It is ok to use an over the counter suppository (such as Dulcolax) or an oral laxative (such as Dulcolax tabs, Milk of Magnesia, Miralax), as needed, if you have had no bowel movement by 3 days after your surgery.
11. Do not schedule dental work for two weeks prior to your surgery or for 4-6 weeks following your surgery. If you have had a fusion surgery you will require antibiotic premedication before any dental procedures for 1 year post op. This is typically something your dentist will prescribe.
12. It is ok to sleep on your sides or your back.
13. Hot tubs – Patients who have had a fusion should not use a hot tub for at least 3 months post op. If you have had a laminectomy, laminotomy or foraminotomy and do not have any surgical implants or bone graft you may use a hot tub at 6 weeks post op.
14. **Implant cards** are available upon request if you have had a cervical fusion. This may be required by your airlines before they allow you to clear security.

Calling the Office

We are here to help you. Please call with any questions.

Call the office at 303-697-7463 if any of the following occur:

1. Sustained fever greater than 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit that does not respond to Tylenol. (Do not take Tylenol if you have any contraindications or allergies to Tylenol.)
2. Increasing drainage from the incision(s) (spotty drainage may be normal for the first few days)
3. Incision is very red or warm to the touch.
4. Arm or neck pain or swelling in excess of your pre-operative pain.
5. Difficulty swallowing, shortness of breath.

Calling 911

Please call 911 or go to the **Emergency Room** immediately if any of the following occur:

1. Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or pain with breathing
2. Chest pain, severe headache.
3. Leg pain – specifically calf tightness or swelling
4. Bowel or Bladder loss