Neck Surgery
NEUROSURGERY HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Following these instructions will help you to heal faster and feel better after your surgery. Your doctor may change the instructions for your particular condition. You should follow them until your first doctor’s appointment.

Neck Brace
The neck brace will keep your cervical spine in place while it heals. Wear the brace until your doctor tells you that you no longer need it.

Incision Care
You may remove your dressing 2 days after surgery. If you have sutures or staples, they will need to be removed 1 to 2 weeks after surgery in the Neurosurgery Clinic or in your family doctor’s office. Keep the incision line clean and dry until the sutures or staples have been removed. Do not apply any ointments such as Neosporin® or lotions to your incision line until it is completely healed. Your incision line most likely has been closed with stitches under the skin and reinforced with Steri-strips®. You can expect them to begin to fall off within 10-14 days. Do not pull or tug on the Steri-strips®, since this may pull on the incision line. If they are still on after 14 days, remove them gently. Keep the skin under the collar or brace clean and dry to prevent irritation. Look at it daily for any signs of skin breakdown.

Shower / Bath
Keep the incision line dry for at least 4 days after surgery. You may shower with a plastic, protective dressing over the incision. Do not allow the water to spray directly on the protective dressing or the incision line. If you are wearing a cervical collar, wear one to shower and wear another collar the rest of the time. Do not go swimming or take tub baths until your incision is completely healed (approximately 10-14 days) or until your staples or stitches have been removed.

Exercise / Lifting
Do not lift anything heavier than a pitcher of water. Avoid twisting or any sudden movements of your neck following surgery. The best exercise following surgery is walking. You should begin walking short distances immediately after surgery and gradually increase the distance as much as you can, up to 1-2 miles daily. Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes and stay on flat, even surfaces. You may climb stairs as soon as you feel like it. Be sure to use the handrail. Your doctor will talk with you about when you will be able to return to your usual activities.

Driving
Driving may cause strain while your neck is healing after surgery. You may ride as a passenger, but if you travel long distances, you should stop every hour or so and walk for several minutes. This will help the circulation in your legs. Your doctor would prefer that you do not drive for at least 2 weeks after surgery or any time you are taking pain medicine.
If you are wearing a collar, you will not be able to drive. When you begin driving again, you need to feel that you can apply the brakes quickly and hard without fear of pain in your neck, shoulders, or arms.

**Returning to work**
Before you are discharged from the hospital, talk with your doctor about returning to work. Patients typically return to office work 4-8 weeks after surgery. Work that requires more physical labor may need to be postponed several more weeks.

**Medicines**
Your doctor will give you prescriptions before you leave the hospital, and your nurse will help you understand how to take them. You should expect a certain amount of pain during the healing process until the inflammation and sensitivity of the nerves has decreased. As you heal, you will probably need less medicine for pain. Do this by increasing the amount of time between pain pills. Call your doctor if you continue to have pain after you have finished your prescription. Most of the time, prescriptions for pain medicine are not refilled.

**Constipation** is a side effect of taking pain medicine. To control constipation,
• drink more water
• eat more fiber such as fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains
• take an over-the-counter laxative to help your bowels work properly.

**Nutrition**
A well balanced diet is important for proper wound healing. This includes foods from each basic food group (dairy products, meat, vegetables, fruit and bread). Since you will be less active during your recovery period, you should avoid high calorie foods. Controlling your weight will help you develop a stronger, more comfortable neck and back.

**Call your doctor at (615) 322-7417* if you have...**
• a change in the skin around the incision, such as redness, swelling, or any drainage from the incision line
• more pain, weakness or numbness in your arms
• trouble swallowing or breathing
• temperature of 101.5° F or more, or chills
• extreme discomfort from wearing the brace

*This phone is answered 24 hours a day for emergency calls. Please call during office hours for non-emergency calls.

**Additional Instructions**