Back 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.

Incision care
You may remove your dressing 2 days after surgery. Keep your incision clean and dry for four days. Your staples or sutures will need to be removed in the Vanderbilt Neurosurgery Clinic or by your family doctor, usually 1-2 weeks after your surgery. If you do not have staples or sutures that you can see, your incision has been closed with stitches under the skin and reinforced with Steri-strips®. You can expect these strips to begin to loosen and fall off in 10-14 days. If they have not come off in 2 weeks, you may gently remove them. Do not apply any lotions or ointments such as Neosporin® to the incision line until it has completely healed.

Lifting and bending
Do not lift anything heavier than a pitcher of water. Do not bend at the waist. If you need to bend, use your hips and knees instead. You will also need to avoid twisting your back.

Exercise
The best exercise after back surgery is walking. This allows your back to heal while increasing the strength in your back muscles. You should begin walking short distances immediately after surgery and gradually increase the distance as you can, up to 1-2 miles daily. Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes and stay on flat, even surfaces. Avoid all strenuous activity, including heavy work around your home. Your doctor will guide you in helping you return to your normal activities.

Sitting, standing or climbing
Sitting or standing for long periods is not recommended because it can make you have more pain. When sitting, avoid soft chairs and deep sofas. Sitting should be limited to 20-30 minutes at a time. However, you may sit in a reclining position for longer periods. You may climb stairs as soon as you feel able. Be sure to use the handrail.

Bathing or showering
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. 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.

Driving
Driving may cause strain while your back 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 as well as prevent muscle spasms and pain in your back. Your doctor would prefer that you do not drive for at least 2 weeks after surgery or any time you are taking pain medicine. When you begin to drive, you need to feel that you can apply the brakes quickly and hard without fear of pain in your back or legs.

Returning to work
Most people return to work 4 to 12 weeks after surgery. Before you leave the hospital or at your first follow-up appointment, talk to your doctor about your progress after surgery, the kind of work that you do, and when you can expect to return.

Sexual Activity
Sexual activity is allowed. However, it may cause strain on your back while you are healing. You may need to use positions which are more comfortable for you.

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
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 there is less physical activity during your recovery period, you should avoid high calorie foods. Controlling your weight will help you develop a stronger, more comfortable back.

Call your doctor at (615) 322-7417* if you have...
• a change in the skin around the incision, such as redness, heat, swelling, or drainage from your incision
• temperature greater than 101.4°F or chills
• trouble walking
• increased pain in your back or legs

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