



## **Post-Operative Instructions - Posterior Cervical Spine Surgery with Fusion**

The following is a list of instructions, for your convalescence, following your neck surgery with fusion. These represent general instructions to be used as guidelines. They may be modified for an individual patient.

1. The surgical procedure you had was performed in conjunction with another surgeon or physician assistant. Post-operative questions can be addressed with either provider. This team approach leads to better patient care and outcome.
2. In most cases, your surgery will not require a cervical (neck) collar. If a soft collar is given, this will be worn for comfort only. If a hard collar is given, generally this is worn at all times except for showering, unless advised otherwise. The length of use will be determined by your surgeon.
3. You will have some post-operative pain. Surgery on the back of the neck can be quite uncomfortable for several days after surgery. Ice is generally very helpful, placed over the back of the neck and shoulders.
4. You can shower and wash your hair 24 hours following the surgery. It is important to keep the waterproof dressing over the incision prevent it from getting wet.
5. You will remove the dressing by the 5th post-operative day and leave the incision(S) open to air. Most of the sutures or stitches we use are absorbable and do not need to be removed. You will notice Steri-strips covering your incision when the dressing is removed. Once the Steri-strips get wet, they may curl up and fall off by themselves.
6. If you have visible stitches or staples, they will need to be removed you should make an appointment for 10-14 days after the surgery. This may be earlier than your scheduled post-op visit.
7. Limit your lifting to no more than 10 pounds, and avoid overhead lifting.
8. Your first post-operative visit with the surgeon or physician assistant is usually 2 to 3 weeks after the surgery. You will need to get an X-ray of your neck prior to your first post-operative visit with your surgeon. A prescription will be included in the surgical packet of information that is mailed to you prior to your surgery.

9. You may drive 10 days after surgery, if your neck feels comfortable. If you are wearing a hard collar you cannot drive. You can be a passenger in a car after 7 days if you are comfortable.
10. Your surgeon will tell you when you may return to work. It usually occurs between the 3rd and 4<sup>th</sup> week following your operation.
11. Medications may include pain relievers and analgesics to control pain, although they may cause drowsiness and constipation. They may also be habit forming and you may want to consider the amount of pain medication you are taking. You may also consider taking multivitamins with iron on a daily basis for a few weeks post-operatively.
12. Constipation is a common side effect of some pain medications so it is important to drink plenty of liquids and eat a diet high in fiber. You may need to take a stool softener for a short time while taking pain medication, but avoid strong laxatives. Consider Milk of Magnesia, Metamucil, Fibercon, Citrucel or other mild laxatives.
13. Please call the office if you are in need of any prescription refills. Be sure to call during business hours on Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Prescription renewal by phone may require 48 hours to refill. Please be aware that prescriptions for narcotics will not be provided by a covering (on-call) surgeon.
14. Report any increase in post-operative pain, fever, chills, drainage, swelling of the wound or any redness of the wound immediately to our office. If there is drainage, note the color, amount and consistency. Also call us if you are having headaches. Do not hesitate to call if you have any questions.
15. CAUTION: It is well known that smoking severely slows down the healing process for all patients with low back surgery. Nicotine can adversely affect the rate of fusion and recurrent disc herniation.