Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion: preparing and planning for surgery

The anterior spinal fusion is surgery from the lower abdomen. People who have this surgery are usually ready to discharge the day after surgery.

Preparing and Planning for Surgery

Please refer to your “having surgery at UW Hospital” book for general instructions

After Surgery

Activity

Sitting: You can sit for any length of time based on your comfort level. You should change your position at least every 30-45 minutes. If you become uncomfortable change your position and activity.

Sleeping: You may sleep on your back, stomach, or side. You may also use pillows for support when lying on your side. Place pillows behind your back and between your legs. When you lie on your back, place pillows under your legs.

Bathing: You may shower in 5 days. Avoid tub baths for the first 2 weeks.

Driving: Do not drive for 2 weeks or while you are taking narcotic pain medicine. You may be a passenger.

Sexual Activity: After 2 weeks, you may resume sexual activity when comfortable.

Restrictions: Do not lift more than 10 pounds (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first 6 weeks. Do not bend or twist at the waist, but you may squat with your knees. No sports until your first follow-up visit other than the walking program.

Return to Work

Your return to work will depend on how you recover and the type of work you do. If you have to lift more than 10 lbs., you will not be able to return for 6-12 weeks. If you lift less than 10 lbs., you could return to work in 2 weeks. You must discuss this with your doctor.

Pain Control

While you are healing, you may notice some pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness in your back or legs. You may try some of these options to help manage your pain.

Ice Method: First, use ice and try to decrease your activity for 1-2 days. Ice the area for 20 minutes every hour for 4 hours in a row (especially in the evening). Use a ready-made ice pack or put ice in a plastic bag and then wrap the bag in a towel before you use it. Do not put the ice directly on your skin.

Pain Relief: Your pain will improve over time. As the pain improves, you will need less pain pills. All pain medicine should be taken with food and at least 8 ounces of water. If you notice an increase in pain, numbness, or weakness, call your doctor.
Males may experience scrotal swelling or bruising, this is normal. To help with this, apply a cold compress, and lie flat with legs elevated. If there is still abdominal discomfort for more than 24-48 hours, contact the Spine Clinic.

**Incision Care**
- Proper care of the incision helps to prevent infection. If the incision is clean and without discharge, you may stop wearing the dressing after 5 days.
- Keep the incision clean and dry.
- The incision has been closed with sutures under the skin and covered with steri-strips (small pieces of tape) on the skin. These will slowly peel off.
- Check the incision daily to be sure it is clean and dry, change the dressing every other day or as needed.
- Check for redness, swelling or drainage. Some redness and swelling is normal.
- A small amount of clear of slightly blood-tinged drainage from the incision is normal.
- **Do not wash directly over the incision.** Wash around the incision gently with soap and water and then let air dry.
- **Do not use any creams, lotions, ointments, or alcohol near or on the incision.**

**When to Call**
- If you have a temperature above 100.5°F (38.1°C) for two readings taken four hours apart
- Drainage from your incision
- An increase in pain, redness, and/or swelling by your incision
- Difficulty urinating or controlling your bowel movements

**Future Visits**
Your first post-operative visit will be 4-6 weeks after surgery.

**Phone Numbers**
Spine Clinic: (608) 265-3207 Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Neurosurgery Clinic – (608) 263-7501, Monday-Friday 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.
On nights, weekends, and holidays, this number will give you the paging operator. For patients who live out of the area, please call: 1-800-323-8942.