Home Care Instructions after Thoracic and Lumbar Spine Fusion Surgery

Doctor:

This handout will review the care you need to follow once you are home. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your nurse or doctor.

Activity/Limits
You should slowly increase your activity. In most cases common sense will tell you when you are doing too much. On the other hand, doing too little can delay the return of your strength and stamina.

- Climbing stairs is okay to do right after surgery.
- Begin walking 3 times a day once you return home. Increase the distance as you can.
- You may walk anywhere your footing is safe; stairs, treadmills, walking tracks, or inclines.
- No sports, aerobic or cardio activities until seen at your follow up visit.
- Follow the activity limits below until your 4-6-week postop visit with your surgeon:
  - No bending or twisting from the waist.
  - No lifting greater than 10 pounds.
  - Avoid strenuous and jarring activities.

Incision Care
Proper incision care helps to decrease risk of infection. The incision is closed with dissolvable sutures. These should dissolve in 2-3 weeks.

- Surgical dressing should remain in place for 5 days after surgery.
- After the first 5 days, dressing may be removed.
- If no drainage is present, the incision may be left uncovered.
- Some redness and swelling around the incision is normal.
- Do not use any creams, lotions, ointments or alcohol near or on incision.

Once able to remove the dressing, check incision for:
- Redness
- Swelling
- Drainage
- Warmth

Driving
- Do not drive for 2 weeks or while taking narcotic pain medicine.
- Do not drive until your reflexes return to normal and you feel safe to do so.

Sexual Activity
- No sex for 2 weeks.
- After 2 weeks, you may resume sex if comfortable.

Sleeping
- Sleep on either your back or side.
- You may use pillows for support.
- Place pillows behind your knees when lying on your back.
- Place pillows behind your back and between your legs when lying on your side.

Smoking
We strongly suggest you quit using nicotine prior to surgery. It is best to be nicotine free.
for at least 4-6 months after surgery. Forms of nicotine include:
- Cigarettes
- Cigars
- Pipe
- Chewing tobacco
- Nicotine patches
- E-cigarettes/vapes
- Nicotine gum
- Second-hand smoke

**Compression Stockings**
If you are given compression stockings in the hospital, please keep wearing these until you are walking three times a day. This is most often 2-3 days after leaving the hospital. If you notice swelling to your legs, please elevate and put on compression stockings. If swelling does not improve, please call the clinic to discuss.

**Pain Management**
During the healing phase, it is common to have some pain, numbness, tingling and weakness in your neck and arms. Please call the Spine Clinic if there are big changes in your symptoms since leaving the hospital.

Ways to decrease pain after surgery include:
- Ice the incision area for 20-30 minutes several times a day or after increased activity. Be sure to use a towel as a barrier between the ice pack and skin to avoid harm to skin.
- Decrease overall activity for 48 hours.
- Take narcotic medicine as prescribed by your doctor. If you feel the medicine is not decreasing your pain, please contact the clinic to discuss. Do not increase your narcotic pain medicine without talking to your doctor first.
- Do not use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) like ibuprofen, Aleve, aspirin, Diclofenac, etc. for ____ days after surgery.
- Start Tylenol (acetaminophen) right away after surgery. Do not take more than 3000mg within 24-hours.

**Refills**
The goal is to taper you off all narcotic pain medicine 4-6 weeks after surgery. If you need a refill, please call the clinic. Call 2-3 business days before you need the refill. Please provide the pharmacy where you want to pick up a refill.

**Constipation**
Please refer to Health Facts for You: *Constipation from Opioids (Narcotics)* found in the Postoperative Spine Surgery Packet.

**When to Call the Doctor**
- Increased pain, redness or swelling around the incision.
- A change in the amount, color, or odor of drainage.
- Redness, warmth or pain in your calf.
- A temperature above 100.5 F for 24 hours.
- A constant headache that changes between sitting/standing and laying down.
- New chest pain or new problems breathing.

**Return to Work**
The length of time off work will depend on your postop symptoms and type of work you do. If you plan to go back to work before your first postop visit you will have restrictions. Please call to talk about this with your doctor or nurse.
Future Clinic Visits
A 6-week postop visit will be scheduled to check healing and symptoms. All other clinic visits will be determined by your doctor.

Phone Numbers
If you have questions or concerns, please call the Spine Clinic Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM at (608) 265-3207.

Nights, weekends and holidays, call the paging operator at (608) 262-0486. Ask for the “spine resident on call.” Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7025.