



The Surgery

The length of your surgery can be from four to eight hours, depending on the type of procedure you are having done. After surgery, your body will require a comprehensive rehabilitation period to strengthen weakened muscles and soft tissue.

Your Hospital Stay

The type of lumbar procedure that is performed will determine how long you will need to stay in the hospital and how much assistance you may need after surgery. Typically, you will be in the hospital for five days.

The day after surgery is considered day one.

Activity

Under the supervision of a physical therapist, you may sit on the edge of the bed and stand with support. Patients are encouraged to stand and sit (with assistance if needed) within 24 hours after surgery. Walking, however, is approached gradually and in a guided manner that avoids injury. You should be walking more comfortably and climbing stairs by the time you are released from the hospital. The physical therapist will give you a booklet containing exercises before you leave the hospital. Once you are at home, remember to build up your activity level gradually to avoid a flare-up of symptoms.

Treatments

To help expand your lungs and prevent pneumonia, you may have an incentive spirometer, which is a blue tube attached to an air chamber. This device works by placing the end of the tube in your mouth and drawing your air through it. The objective is to keep the blue box located in the air chamber at a constant height and not fluctuating up and down. This device works on inspiration (breathing in), not expiration (breathing out), helping to increase expansion of the lungs and move secretions through them.

It is common to continue intravenous (IV) fluids for one to two days after surgery.

You will have a catheter inserted into your bladder. This will be removed when you are able to get out of bed more easily and more comfortably.



Diet

Your physician will order your diet. Recovery from anesthesia varies from person to person, so your diet will be adjusted as your intestinal function returns to normal. Typically, you will be given clear liquids as soon as you are able to eat. If you tolerate the clear liquids, your diet will be progressed.

Medication

Antibiotics are given through your IV for 24 to 48 hours to help fight infection. Pain medication is available to ensure your comfort and may be given by mouth, injection or through your IV. If you are uncomfortable, please let your nurse know. It is important to try and maintain your pain at a manageable level so that you may continue to progress with your activities.

Brace

Your doctor may ask you to wear a back brace after surgery. The decision to have you wear a brace is based on the extent of your surgery and the quality of bone graft. Remember to wear your brace any time you are out of bed and moving around.

Incision Care

Keep your incision clean and dry. There is no need to keep a dressing over the incision. If steri-strips are in place, they will fall off by themselves when ready, usually in seven to ten days. If the edges start to curl up, cut the edges off.

Notify your physician if any yellowish drainage, significant redness or swelling occurs at the incision site. Also be sure to notify your physician if you develop a fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, if you have a dramatic increase in pain, or if you notice a new numbness and tingling in your arms or legs.



Your Post-Operative Period

Attention to appropriate post-operative care is critical in leading to a successful back surgery. After a fusion surgery, it takes approximately three to six months for the fusion to successfully set up and achieve its initial maturity. The bone will continue to fuse and evolve over the next couple of years. In the event that there has been significant injury to the nerves, it may take up to two years to determine how much nerve recovery will occur.

Read the following information about your post-operative recovery period carefully, and remember to ask any questions that you may have.

The First Two Weeks

It is important to take short walks during the day, possibly during the mid-morning, afternoon and evening hours. Increase your walking exercise to 15 to 20 minute intervals by the end of the second week. You may climb stairs slowly, one at a time. You may use an elevated toilet seat at home.

Do not drive until released to do so by your doctor (usually at the first follow-up office visit). Do not shower until you are five days post-op, and do not take a tub bath for four to six weeks. It is safe to resume sexual activity when it is comfortable for you.

Do not lift anything over ten pounds. You may lift from the waist, as you would when pulling a gallon of milk from the refrigerator to the counter. Do not lift from the ground up. Refrain from forceful pushing or pulling, such as vacuuming or mowing the lawn. If your brace becomes uncomfortable, please call our office to discuss a brace adjustment.

The Third and Fourth Weeks

Increase your walking exercise to 30 to 40 minutes, two to three times a day. It is important to continue to gradually increase your activity.

The First Check-Up After Surgery

Please call the office the next business day after you are released from the hospital to schedule your follow-up appointment. You will need to be seen within four to six weeks. This is also the time when medications will be refilled.

This brochure is not a substitute for medical care. It has been developed by your physician to help you better understand your spine condition, surgery and post-operative instructions.