

DANBURY HOSPITAL

LUMBAR FUSION SURGERY

The following is a list of instructions to assist in your recovery following your lumbar fusion. These are general instructions to be used as **guidelines**.

Post-operative Visit

- Make an appointment for a post-operative visit. This is usually 2 to 3 weeks after surgery.
- X-rays will be taken to check your healing and the placement of the graft and/or hardware used.
- Each individual situation is different. Feel free to ask questions during our office visits.
- Write down your questions before you come into the office so you don't forget anything.
- You will discuss return to work with your surgeon.

Medications

- You will be given prescriptions for pain medicine; they may cause drowsiness and constipation.
- Check the amount you are taking. Painkillers can be habit forming.
- Think about taking multivitamins with iron on a daily basis for a few weeks after the surgery. This may also make you constipated, so you may want to take a stool softener.
- You can also take oral calcium supplements up to 1000mg. per day, which can be helpful for a fusion.
- Check when your prescription is due to be refilled so that you don't run out. Call the surgeon during office hours to renew the prescription. **On call or covering surgeons may not refill a prescription for pain medicine.**

Bathing

- **You may shower** at home after surgery. The waterproof dressing will keep the wound dry.
- Before you are discharged the nurse will provide you with more instructions about caring for your wound.
- **Do not take a bath** for at least three (3) weeks after surgery.

Dressings

- In most cases, dissolvable sutures have been used for your incision. The wound is covered with steri-strips and gauze dressing.
- The dressing is usually a water resistant dressing.
- If staples have been used, you will need to be seen within 10-14 days from surgery at the office to have the staples removed.

Activities

- **Avoid** all activities that require a lot of effort or energy.
- **Avoid** lifting, pushing, or pulling objects that weigh more than 10lbs or about a gallon of milk.
- Bend at the knees and **not** the waist if you have to pick something off the floor.
- Hold on to the back of a chair as you bend. Do not twist the spine in any way.
- You can climb stairs right after your surgery. You should start slowly and use the handrail. For the first day or two have someone with you as you climb the stairs for support.

- You will tire more easily for the first few months after your surgery. It can take a while for your energy level to return to normal. You should rest between activities.
- It is a good idea to get up every morning, bathe, get dressed and resume a normal routine.

Sitting and Sleeping

- To avoid twisting the spine in bed, put a pillow between your legs and pillows at your sides. This will also stop you rolling over onto your stomach.
- Use a straight back chair or fairly rigid recliner for sitting
- Avoid sitting in low or soft chairs. They will not support your back.
- Use a lumbar roll (low back support cushion) when sitting.
- Do not sit for more than 30 minutes in the first 10 days to 2 weeks
- Increase the length and amount of sitting time over the next 6 weeks at a comfortable pace for you.

Exercising

- **No back exercises** for the first 3-4 weeks.
- Your surgeon will decide when you should start formal physical therapy.
- Walking is the best activity to improve your fitness and strength. You can start this very early after your surgery.
- Begin with short 10 minute walks. You can increase the time and distance slowly to a 20-30 minute walk. Try and walk three to four times a day.

Smoking

- Smoking slows down healing for all patients with lower back surgery
- Nicotine can slow down your recovery rate and cause problems for your surgery

Driving

- **You are not to drive** for the first 10 days to 2 weeks after the surgery. You can be a passenger in a car for short distances up to 20 minutes after the first week.
- Too much sitting in a car may worsen back or leg symptoms that were present before surgery. Generally you can drive to the office for your first office visit.

Please call the office if you have any questions

Call the office immediately:

- If there is an increase in post-surgery pain
- Fever higher than 101.
- Chills, drainage, swelling of the wound, or any redness of the wound
- If there is drainage, note the color, amount and thickness.
- If you are having headaches.