

Post-operative instructions

Anterior cervical fusion

- 1) Expect to be discharged the day following surgery, although occasionally patients stay for two days (your insurance company may or may not allow that).
- 2) You will wear a cervical collar for at least 4 weeks post-operatively. This should be worn at all times (including in bed) but may be removed for showering.
- 3) About 3-4 days after surgery, your throat will become swollen. This usually lasts 1-2 days and you may want to sleep in a recliner for that time. It improves quickly but call the office if it persists.
- 4) You will be discharged home with pain medications, muscle relaxants and a 6 day course of steroids to help with the neck swelling.
- 5) DO NOT TAKE ANTI-INFLAMMATORIES (Advil, Alleve, Ibuprofen, Aspirin) for TWO MONTHS after surgery. They inhibit bone healing. Tylenol is fine.
- 6) Ice the incision and the back of your neck three to four times a day, for 10 minutes, for the first week post-operatively.
- 7) You may drive 5-7 days after surgery.
- 8) The stitches are dissolvable. The incision should be kept dry for 5 days; you can shower with the dressing on. You can then leave it open to air and the steri-strips will fall off over the next 1-2 weeks.
- 9) Expect neck pain for 1-2 weeks after surgery at the incision and even extending out to the shoulder. Some people have a flare up of arm pain, twinges in the arms, and tingling down the arms for the first 4 weeks following surgery. This is just inflammation and will settle down. If it persists, please call the office.
- 10) Swallowing is uncomfortable for the first month after surgery. Some patients notice a lump in their throat for several months but it usually resolves sooner. You may eat whatever you want but certain foods may be more difficult.
- 11) Call the office after you get home and schedule your post-operative appointment which will be about 2-3 weeks after surgery. You will need to arrive 45 minutes before the appointment to go to the Radiology department for xrays.
- 12) Physical Therapy begins usually at about 4 weeks post-operatively. You will be given a prescription for it at your post-operative appointment.
- 13) For the first month after surgery, you may lift up to 10 lbs. The second month you may lift 20-25 lbs and after two months, you may lift as much as you can tolerate. You may walk as much as you want right away and use a stationary exercise bike after 2 weeks. No high impact exercise for 2 months after surgery.

- 14) The fusion takes 6 months to 1 year to complete. You will have xrays at post-operative visits at 2-3 weeks, 3 months, 6 months and 9-12 months. The hardware will keep your spine stable until the fusion occurs.
 - 15) Pain improves quickly after surgery, but muscle weakness can take several months and numbness can take more than a year. Sometimes, there is some permanent numbness, especially if you had it for a long time before the surgery.
- 1) Return to work is determined by your occupation, level of pain and function post-operatively and the restrictions outlined above.
 - 2) If you have questions, please call the office.