

Post-operative instructions

Lumbar and Thoracic Fusion

- 1) Expect to be in the hospital for 3-4 days after surgery.
- 2) In the hospital, you will be seen by physical therapy and occupational therapy. You will be fitted with a brace during your stay.
- 3) You will wear the brace when you're out of bed for 3 months after surgery. You may remove it for showering.
- 4) You will be discharged to home with a long acting narcotic pain medication, short acting pain medications, muscle relaxants and stool softeners.
- 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 three to four times a day, for 10 minutes, for the first week post-operatively.
- 7) 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.
- 8) Expect back pain for 1-2 months post-operatively. You will likely need pain medications during that time. Since they are narcotics, please call out office at least 48 hours before you run out for refills.
- 9) Recovery from lumbar fusions takes time. You may experience periodic leg pain and cramps at night for the first several months but they do resolve with time. There are medications to help with this.
- 10) You may drive 2 weeks after surgery provided you are not taking significant narcotic medications by then.
- 11) After you are discharged, please call our office to schedule your first post-operative appointment for 2-3 weeks after surgery. At that time you will need to come in 45 minutes ahead of time and have xrays done in the Radiology department at the hospital.
- 12) Physical Therapy begins 4-6 weeks post-operatively. You will be given a prescription for it at the time of your visit. You may remove your brace for physical therapy.
- 13) For the first month you may lift up to 10 lbs, the second through fourth months 20-25 lbs. After four months, you may increase your lifting and activity level as tolerated. Over time, you should be able to return to almost all of your pre-operative activities.
- 14) You should walk as much as possible as soon as you can after surgery. You may use a stationary bike after 2-3 weeks. No high impact activities for four months after surgery.

- 15) The fusion takes 12-18 months to complete. The hardware will hold your spine in place until that occurs. You will have xrays to monitor the fusion at 2-3 weeks, 3 months, 6 months and 12 months after surgery.
- 16) Usually you will be given an external bone stimulator to wear to accelerate the fusion process. This should be worn 2-4 hours per day for 6 –8 months.
- 17) 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.
- 18) Return to work is determined by your occupation, level of pain and function post-operatively and the restrictions outlined above.
- 19) If you have questions, please call the office.