

Cervical Spine Post-Operative Instructions:

- **Follow up Appointment:**
 - Call the office to confirm your 2-week follow-up appointment.
- **Medications and Pain Management:**
 - *Pain*
 - Take your pain medications as instructed so you do not run out early.
 - **Expect to have some discomfort.** The medication is to control moderate to severe pain.
 - Check with your doctor before you take any non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin, Advil, Ibuprofen, or Naproxen as they may delay your healing.
 - Muscle relaxers and pain medications can be taken together.
 - You may take over-the-counter Tylenol to supplement unless contraindicated due to allergies or other health conditions.
 - *Blood Thinners*
 - Check with your surgeon before restarting blood thinners such as Coumadin, Plavix, Heparin, Arixtra, Lovenox, Pradaxa, Xarelto or Aspirin.
 - *Home Medications*
 - Resume your other home medications as instructed by your physician.
 - *Ice Therapy*
 - Use ice packs up to 20 minutes per hour to reduce pain. Avoid placing them directly on your skin or incision site.
 - Caution: extended time using ice packs can cause frost bite.
 - *Heat Therapy*
 - Heat can help with muscle tightness or spasms.
 - Caution: do not apply a heating pad directly over your incision site.
- **Wound Care:**
 - Your incision may have been closed using sutures, staples, glue, or strips of tape.
 - If you have sutures or staples, they will need to be removed 2 weeks after surgery.
 - Do not remove the strips of tape or glue. Allow them to fall off on their own.
 - Remove any gauze dressing 2 days after surgery. Apply dressing over the incision only if instructed during discharge (for comfort or slight drainage).
 - **Showering/Bathing**
 - If your incision was closed with skin glue, you may shower the same day.
 - If your incision was closed with sutures or staples, you may shower 2 days after your surgery (unless your surgeon has placed a silver dressing over your incision).
 - Use mild soap.
 - Do not scrub your incision, pat it dry after your shower.
 - Do not take baths until cleared by your surgeon.

- Look at your incision daily to check for swelling, redness, and drainage.
 - Call your surgeon if you notice an increasing amount of redness, swelling,
- If you have a silver dressing over your incision, keep it in place for two weeks or until the first follow-up visit with your surgeon.
 - If it begins to fall off, you may remove it and follow the instructions above.
- Keep the wound out of direct sunlight.
- Do not use lotions or ointments at incision site until cleared by your surgeon's office.
- **Braces:**
 - *Hard Collar*
 - This type of brace needs to be worn 24/7 (even while sleeping).
 - *Soft Collar*
 - Used for comfort and pain control as needed.
 - This brace can be removed for sleeping and showering.
- **Activity:**
 - *Sleeping*
 - Sleep with your neck in a neutral position, providing support with a pillow may be helpful.
 - *Driving*
 - Do not drive until you are comfortable and no longer taking pain prescription medications.
 - *Swimming*
 - No swimming, hot tubs, or any other recreational sport activity until cleared by your physician.
 - *Exercise*
 - Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds (gallon of milk) until you have been cleared at your two-week post-operative appointment.
 - Start a daily walking regimen. Begin with frequent, short walks each day the first week and increase as tolerated.
 - Physical Therapy is typically prescribed at your 6-week post-op appointment.
 - Limit sitting to 30-45 minutes at a time and increase gradually if tolerated.
 - Rest and take naps throughout the day if you are tired.
 - Continue to use assistive devices you were given for home use such as a walker, cane or brace.
 - Sexual activity may be resumed when you are comfortable.
 - *Travel*
 - Check with your physician if you plan to travel. You may need to stay close to the hospital for the immediate post-operative period.
 - *Return to work*
 - Work with your physician to come up with an individualized return to work plan. Each patient recovers at their own pace.

- *Smoking*
 - **Please do not smoke or use tobacco products** as it can severely impact and delay healing.
- **Home Care:**
 - Remove throw rugs, electrical cords, and anything else that may cause you to fall.
 - Arrange your household to keep items within your reach.
- **Diet:**
 - Eat soft foods such as yogurt, eggs, soup, mashed potatoes, Jello, apple sauce, cooked vegetables, etc. until swallowing improves
 - Do not take medication on an empty stomach to avoid nausea.
 - Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
 - Increase your daily intake of fiber to avoid constipation.
 - **Do not drink alcohol** after surgery as it can cause bleeding problems and can interact with medications.
- **Bowel function:**
 - Pain medications can cause constipation.
 - Use over-the-counter medications daily to help prevent this:
 - Stool softeners (Colace)
 - Laxatives (Senokot)
 - Colace and Senokot are also available as a 2 in 1 combination tablet known as Senna-S or Senna-Plus



- If you have not had a bowel movement by the third day at home, you may try:
 - Fleet enema
 - Magnesium citrate tablets or liquid
 - Mag O7
 - Miralax



- These medications are typically available at CVS, Walgreens, Walmart, or Amazon.
- If you have no result, call your surgeon's office for further instructions.

*****Call 911 right away if you have chest pain or shortness of breath.**

• **Symptoms and problems to look out for:**

- Call your surgeon immediately if you are experiencing:
 - Increased difficulty swallowing
 - Severe pain not relieved by the medication
 - Fever greater than 101°F
 - Increased redness, pain, swelling, or drainage from the incision
 - Increased weakness
 - Severe headache
 - Difficulty with urination, loss of control urinating or having a bowel movement, or numbness/ decreased sensation in your pubic region
 - Foot, ankle, or calf swelling not relieved by elevating your legs
- If you have urgent questions or concerns after discharge, please contact your surgeon's office.